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ABSTRACT

Strategic planning techniques for administrators, with a focus on process managers, are presented in this guidebook. The three major tasks of the strategic planning process include the assessment of the current organizational situation, goal setting, and the development of strategies to accomplish this. Strategic planning differs from long-range planning, in that it is based on the assumption that the future will be very different from the present. Advantages of strategic planning are creativity, flexibility, simplicity, participative decision making, and rationality. A strategic planning model to be implemented by a process manager and school district planning team is described. The 10 stages of the model are outlined in detail, some of which involve the process manager role, committee selection, goal setting, and assessment of the external and internal environments. Appendices to each section provide samples, information sheets, and worksheets to facilitate collaboration and productive decision making. (8 references) (LMI)

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HOW TO BUILD A STRATEGIC PLAN:

A STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE FOR SCHOOL MANAGERS

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CLAY, LAKE and TREMAIN

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HOW TO BUILD A STRATEGIC PLAN:

A STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE FOR SCHOOL MANAGERS

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Permission is granted to duplicate Strategic Planner's Notebook pages, overheads, worksheets, and information sheets for use with strategic planning teams.

ABOUT VENTURES FOR PUBLIC AWARENESS:

Ventures for Public Awareness is a non-profit corporation on the San Francisco Peninsula, specializing in research, writing and publishing for educational practitioners.

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TO THE SUPERINTENDENT AND BOARD OF EDUCATION:

INTRODUCTION

We assume that you have already decided to do a strategic plan for your school organization, or you would not be reading this book. (If you want to know more about strategic planning and its advantages and disadvantages, please see pages 10 to 17.) What we hope to offer you is a simple, straightforward scheme for accomplishing that plan. Our model is based on our own experience with strategic planning for a number of school and community organizations, and on the experiences of others that we have gathered through interviews and readings. Our model is not fancy or unusual, but it works!

It calls for the selection of a district employee--probably a central office administrator--to run the entire system as a **PROCESS MANAGER**. This person will do all the organizing, coaching, inspiring, troubleshooting, and paper-maneuvering for twelve to fifteen school and community members, who have been selected to be the district's **STRATEGIC PLANNING TEAM**. The role of process manager in our scheme requires a heavy commitment: one-quarter to one-third working time over a year.

If no staff person can be released for that amount of time, you might consider hiring a consulting firm that specializes in strategic planning. The firm will bring its own planning design and materials. Its people will be experienced and will have neutrality as "outsiders." But such firms are expensive, and we believe that--given sufficient enthusiasm and commitment--strategic planning can be managed in-house.

Your Role in the Strategic Planning Process

As the top management of the district, you must take a very active role. In some strategic planning models, top management is responsible for the entire process, making it a "top down" management function. However, our model is simultaneously a "top down" and "bottom

up" process. It involves wide participation, but it cannot succeed without the superintendent and Board. The process manager is the "executive" of the process, but you provide the leadership and the authority. Your leadership should be demonstrated in several ways:

- **Being on the strategic planning team.** The superintendent and at least one Board member should be committed, enthusiastic members of the planning team.

- **Setting the stage and selecting the strategic planning team.** You can greatly influence how the district and the community receive strategic planning. Some people may be suspicious of your motives when you call for a close examination and possible redirection of the district. Setting a tone of openness and objective inquiry will help allay their suspicions.

  Your selection of planning team members should be made carefully. Take time to consider the "key players" in your district and the ramifications of various choices. For example, how will teachers feel if their union is represented--or not represented--on the team? Do you want community members on the team, or would you rather use district employees only, allowing them to plan "in private"? What will you do if too many influential people want to be on the team?

- **Supporting the process manager.** You will need to work closely with the process manager in selecting the strategic planning team and designing meeting agendas. You will also need to give the process manager concrete support: secretarial assistance, a budget, a system of release time/substitutes for teachers and administrators working on the team, and access to the services of district staff or outside consultants, if needed.

- **Supporting the finished plan.** Strategic planning is a long, complex process, requiring the hard work of many people. If you do not use the recommendations made, much of the process will have been wasted and your strategic planning team is likely to be resentful. Participative management will get a black eye in your district.

  You must be willing to make hard political choices inspired by the

plan, perhaps cutting staff and re-directing budgets to new programs at the expense of old. You know what opposition such measures can generate. A strategic plan won't prevent political battles and budget fights, but it may help you win them by providing a rational framework for making management decisions.

Once the strategic plan is written, the burden of implementation and momentum will be yours. The school/community planning team will dissolve. Experience indicates that communicating the plan and maintaining enthusiasm for it are two very critical parts of the process. They are your job.

You should be prepared to be patient. Just writing the strategic plan is likely to take a year or more; then it must be communicated and implemented districtwide. This is not a planning model for a crisis. Instead, it is an evolution toward more visionary, participatory, proactive leadership. Evolution takes time.

With all these caveats, we think you will still find that strategic planning is a valuable process. We've seen the enthusiasm it ignites in participants and the creativity and new perspectives generated when people take time to ask such questions as, "What do we believe in?" "What business are we in?" We've also seen the commitment that develops when school and community members share a common base of knowledge about the schools and a common vision of what they should do.

We think you'll find it worthwhile.

TO THE PROCESS MANAGER: HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

This book is designed to walk you through the strategic planning process you've been designated to manage. We offer you a simple, self-contained system for what is actually a very complicated process.

We assume you are a busy person, so we've written things step-by-step. You won't have to re-invent any wheels, if you don't want to. We've tried to anticipate the tough little details; for example, giving you reminders about paper work and when it needs to be done.

We've also tried to help with the most critical factor in any group process: people. The people on your strategic planning team will be high-powered, influential types. (They wouldn't have been selected if they weren't.) They are donating precious time to your process, and you need to give them the courtesy of an effective, efficient organization and well-managed meetings. You may very well be a trained meeting manager and/or facilitator. But in case it has been awhile since you've practiced these skills, we offer some "refresher" tips on effective meeting management and group process techniques in the Appendixes.

Your Role as Process Manager

As the process manager, you will be the "executive" of the strategic planning team. In that sense, you are not "quite" a member of the planning team. You will have to maintain neutrality in order to manage the group process. Unless you hire a facilitator to manage meetings, you will not be able to contribute your ideas in the same way that other members of the planning team will.

Organizing. For each of the ten steps in this strategic planning model, you'll be setting schedules, arranging meeting times and places, coordinating people and materials, serving as the communications link for the team, arranging for any needed outside assistance, preparing agendas, and chairing meetings. We've provided you with a

list of tasks and other details for each step. Because every step in the process is self-contained, you are free to redesign steps or activities when you choose and to rely on our "recipe" when you don't.

Coaching. You will be the one who orients and trains the strategic planning team members. We've adopted a simple "learn-as-you-go" approach. Each step includes a one-page "Strategic Planner's Notebook" reading to be sent to team members prior to their work. It gives them the knowledge they need to accomplish that step, at the time they need to know it. (Strategic Planner's Notebook #1, which begins on page 10, is actually longer than one page. It presents an overview of our entire strategic planning model. We suggest that you send this to prospective team members, so that they have an idea of what they are getting into.)

Throughout the process, you may need to do some instructing and/or team building in the area of "group process." Some of your team members might not know, for example, how to brainstorm. In that case, you should begin the first brainstorming session with a one-minute lesson.

By providing organized, efficient meetings and by modeling good meeting behavior, you'll train your team members in effective group process. Good meeting management techniques (e.g., preparing an agenda in advance) should be used in every single session of this planning process. Rather than bore you by constantly repeating these details, we assume that you'll carry out effective management procedures at every meeting. If you need a refresher, you'll find guidelines in Appendix A.

Inspiring. As the central organizer of the strategic planning process, you are likely to be playing the role of "cheerleader" as well as "coach." We have found that most people enjoy the process; maintaining group enthusiasm is not difficult. But in any team process, there are "down" times, frustrations, and emotional roadblocks. We've tried to help you anticipate these throughout the text.

One way to deal with emotional issues in a meeting environment is to bring in an outside facilitator, who acts as a neutral party. A facilitator is skilled in dealing with "people" problems that may arise; he or she will also free you to join the group as a member--to be in-

volved in the planning itself. We recommend that you hire a facilitator for certain complex and/or potentially emotional planning meetings. You will find more information on facilitators in Appendix B.

Trouble-shooting. No guidebook can cover every contingency. We've appended a short bibliography of further resources on strategic planning and meeting management.

Paper-maneuvering. In its final form, a strategic planning report is supposed to be a succinct, lean document. That is no indication of the quantity of paper that precedes it. Because the paper flow of strategic planning is heavy and complex, we've given special attention to detailing written products: providing samples of style for various pieces, suggestions for getting them written, and reminders for getting them distributed to all the right people at all the right times.

How to Use This Book

Our model consists of ten steps, conducted in linear order. A separate chapter is devoted to each step, with the following information:

Strategic Planner's Notebook: The first page (or pages in the case of Strategic Planner's Notebook #1) presents a rationale and overview of the step. It should be sent to all team members prior to the first meeting on that step, so that they will be oriented to the task at hand. Together, the Notebook pages form a detailed explanation of our process that team members can keep as a reference.

Process: The next pages are for you. The first one explains the goal of the step, any special materials you might need, tips or problems to watch for, and the outcome, which is usually a written product. On subsequent pages you will find a detailed list and explanation of the tasks you need to accomplish for that step.

Samples, information sheets, and worksheets: We've provided samples whenever we feel a process calls for a form letter, worksheet, or examples (of mission statements, strategic goals, etc.). You are free to copy our offerings or adapt them to suit your needs.

"Getting Ready for": If things are going to be forgotten, it is most likely to occur between the steps of the process. Therefore, we've provided short checklists of reminders, so you will always be prepared for the next step.

Three other sections conclude the book:

"Afterwards: Putting the Plan to Work": The final act of a strategic planning team is usually to present its report to the Board of Education for adoption. Your assignment as process manager may end at that point. Implementation is the responsibility of the whole district and school site administration, not yours personally. But to finish the cycle, we've included a brief chapter on some considerations in the implementation process.

Appendixes: Here you'll find a variety of "reference materials": meeting management tips; ideas for working with a facilitator; help with such group process issues as brainstorming, reaching consensus, prioritizing, and keeping on task; and a process timeline.

Bibliography: The book ends with a brief list of additional readings.

A Note About Time

The ten steps outlined in this book will probably take about one year. We're sorry, but we can't be more specific than that. A chart in Appendix G outlines the flow of the process, but without firm dates.

We wish we could have said: "Step #4: Developing a Mission Statement will take your team exactly three four-hour meetings. Schedule them on three consecutive Thursdays from 6 P.M. to 10 P.M." But there are too many variables to allow that kind of specificity. Your meeting schedule will have to be based on the needs of your team. For example, teachers and administrators often have more time during the summer, when they can use their "professional days" for concentrated work. But the community residents on your team may be away on vacation some of that time. You'll have to schedule certain steps around holidays, vacations, and the busier segments of the school year. Which steps you'll have to adjust depends on the month of the year in which you start the process.

All-day retreat sessions are particularly efficient for intense tasks like developing the mission statement. Some people find it easier to get to an all-day session than to two or three evening sessions after a full day's work. On the other hand, some people may not be able to give you whole days at a time.

Your calendar will also be affected if you can streamline the process with shortcuts. Your local United Way office or some other agency may have done their own strategic plan, complete with an "external scan" of your community. Some of the scanning data may be relevant to the schools, and using it may save your team a tremendous amount of data-collection time. If your district has recently completed a program quality review or an accreditation study, you may have, right at hand, much of the data you need for your internal scan.

Every strategic planning team is different: one team will speed through a certain step in one day, while another team will be on that same step for weeks. This can't be predicted. We hope that the information we're providing on the "what" of strategic planning will make your job of scheduling the "when" that much easier.

HOW TO BUILD A STRATEGIC PLAN:

A Step-by-Step Guide for School Managers

PRE-PLANNING

Step #1: Selecting Team Members

Step #2: Conducting an Orientation Meeting

DEFINING BELIEFS AND VALUES

Step #3: Clarifying Organizational Values

Step #4: Developing a Mission Statement

CREATING A KNOWLEDGE BASE FOR PLANNING AND CHANGE

Step #5: Scanning the External Environment

Step #6: Scanning the Internal Environment

Step #7: Developing a Surprise-free Scenario

DEVELOPING THE STRATEGIC PLAN

Step #8: Creating a Vision

Step #9: Building Strategic Goals

Step # 10: Gaining Board Approval

PUTTING THE PLAN TO WORK

STRATEGIC PLANNER'S NOTEBOOK #1:

AN OVERVIEW OF STRATEGIC PLANNING FOR EDUCATION

A key task for private industry today is keeping ahead of change: predicting and molding the future, instead of waiting to be molded by it. In the 1960s, corporate management developed "strategic planning" specifically to deal with rapid change, as well as with complex organizational structures created by big mergers and with new--often conflicting--demands from the marketplace, consumer advocates, and government regulators.

Schools have always borrowed management theories and methods from private industry. Now many schools are adopting strategic planning, because schools also have to deal with change, complexity, and conflicting demands.

Long-range planning techniques have been around for decades. But long-range planning is based on the assumption that the future is a product of the present. Strategic planning rests on the assumption that the future will be very different from the present. Therefore, it doesn't try to extrapolate the future so much as it tries to "envision" it. It makes an educated guess about what the challenges of the future will be, then decides what the organization needs to become to meet those challenges. Working backwards from this vision of the future, it plans what to do today and tomorrow to reach that future organization.

The term "strategic" highlights the proactive, aggressive nature of this form of planning. As in military strategy, one determines the goal or target before designing strategies for reaching it.

The strategic planning process may be likened to planning a trip. Deciding where you want to go is only part of the planning. You have to decide how to get there: your strategy. To do that, you have to know where you are now and what your capabilities are. (For example, do you have enough money for a plane ticket?) You have to

know the terrain and conditions--the environment--you'll be traveling through. (Even if you can afford a plane ticket, it won't do you much good if your destination doesn't have an airport.)

Strategic planning considers all these factors: what and where the organization is now; what environmental factors affect it; where it wants to go in the future; and, finally, what strategies it should use to get from where it is to where it wants to be.

Who Does Strategic Planning

Strategic planning involves the top managers of an organization. In a school district, this includes the superintendent and members of the Board of Education. But strategic planning is also participative planning. A strategic planning team for a school district may include administrators, teachers, students, and/or members of the community, all of whom are "stakeholders" in the schools.

Whether or not they are directly involved in creating the strategic plan, stakeholders must accept the plan, "buy in" to it, and willingly use it as a guide for their own efforts. If the people of an organization reject the plan--or just choose to ignore it--it fails. Instead of a living plan, it becomes just one more dead document gathering dust on a bookshelf.

The Three Basic Tasks of Strategic Planning

There are many discrete steps in the strategic planning process, but these can be grouped into three main tasks: (1) determining what and where the organization is now; (2) deciding what or where the organization should be in the future; and (3) developing the strategies to get from here to there.

Determining what and where the organization is now. This is the longest, most complex phase of the planning process. It involves careful data collection, followed by an objective analysis of the organization itself and of the environment in which it functions.

A special feature of strategic planning is the emphasis it places on values, beliefs, and ideals. Its analysis of an organization does not just chart physical assets; it also explores the values that drive the organization's people and their perception of what their organization does (its "mission"). The "corporate culture" literature demonstrates how powerful values are in molding organizational behavior. Yet in daily life, values and assumptions are seldom even spoken of, much less clarified. A unique benefit of strategic planning is that it requires people to discuss and agree on the values and beliefs they hold about their organization.

The organization is also studied objectively: data is collected through an internal scan that weighs the organization's capabilities, assets, strengths, weaknesses, and needs.

The organization's "environment"--the world it inhabits--must be studied, because changes in the environment have so great an impact on what the organization can or should do. Environmental changes for a business might include changes in clientele, in a competitor's pricing policy, or in government regulations. Schools face many comparable changes: changes in student populations that bring more ethnic, language, and lifestyle diversity; changes in state funding formulas; new legal mandates and accountability measures.

Not all environmental changes are negative. It is easy for pessimism to prevail, but in studying the changing environment one must look for more than "threats" to defend against. Positive "opportunities" also exist: beneficial new directions in which an organization might move, if only it could spot them early enough.

After studying all this, a strategic planning team should have a very complete picture of what and where its organization is: the beliefs and values by which it operates, its perception of what it is and does (its mission), its internal characteristics and capabilities, and the effects of its external environment.

Deciding where the organization should be in the future. Using the above data, the team synthesizes the trends it discovered into a picture of the organization's future: a "surprise-free scenario." It is called "surprise-free" because it is the team's best effort to do the impossible: to predict the future so that there are no surprises. It en-

tails selecting the most important trends and changes and determining the most reasonable outcome for each. For example, it is possible that the student population of a district could double in one year, or it could disappear entirely, but neither scenario is very likely. Instead of trying to plan for every extreme scenario, the planning team selects a reasonable or likely estimate, states its assumption, and plans on that basis.

With a potential future outlined, the team can now decide how the organization should change to most creatively meet and fit into that future. This task involves a change of perspective. Up to now the team has been involved in detailed, objective analysis. Envisioning the organization of the future is less a task of analysis than of creativity. It is important to "blue sky," to play with unusual perspectives and new options. The essence of strategic planning is to avoid having a future that is dictated by the past, but instead, to envision a desired future and move toward it.

Developing the strategies to get from here to there. The actual planning process involves setting directions toward the "ideal" organization envisioned for the future.

It is important to remember that the strategic planning team is setting "strategy," not writing action plans. School personnel will decide how to implement the vision or directions set by the strategic planning team.

Steps in the Strategic Planning Process

These three broad tasks comprise the central portion of a ten-step strategic planning process developed by Clay, Lake, and Tremain. Many other plans exist in the literature or have been developed by individual school districts. This particular model has been derived from both literature and experience.

PRE-PLANNING

Step #1: Selecting Team Members

Step #2: Conducting an Orientation Meeting

DEFINING BELIEFS AND VALUES

Step #3: Clarifying Organizational Values

Step #4: Developing a Mission Statement

CREATING A KNOWLEDGE BASE FOR PLANNING AND CHANGE

Step #5: Scanning the External Environment

Step #6: Scanning the Internal Environment

Step #7: Developing a Surprise-free Scenario

DEVELOPING THE STRATEGIC PLAN

Step #8: Creating a Vision

Step #9: Building Strategic Goals

Step #10: Gaining Board Approval

PUTTING THE PLAN TO WORK

Members of the strategic planning team carry out steps #3-#10. Once the Board of Education has approved the strategic plan and adopted the goals, those goals are implemented through regular district planning, budgeting, and work processes.

The Advantages of Strategic Planning

Why should any school district engage in such elaborate analysis and planning? The key is in the chance it offers for a proactive approach to change. If a reactive approach to management ever really worked, it will not work now. There is no time to take a "wait and see" approach to new issues--they come too fast and from too many different directions. For many problems, there is no longer even time to duck out of the way. It is now essential to be proactive.

Strategic planning has other advantages as a planning mechanism:

It is creative and innovative. Hard data analysis is certainly part of the process, but so is "visioning." Because one assumes that the future will be different, one is not chained by past precedent. One is freer to try new ideas.

Its process is flexible and lean. The model is flexible in that it is easily adaptable to local needs and timelines. The first planning cycle takes about one year, but this can be slowed or speeded up, if necessary. It is lean in that it avoids bureaucracy and excessive paper-generation. The final product is not a weighty document out of a "planning department," but a succinct statement of organizational mission and strategic goals, written by top managers with a select team of leaders. The emphasis is on action and decisions, not on paper justifications.

It combines the best features of "top down" and "bottom up" management. Top management maintains its responsibility for overall direction, but the planning team includes broad representation of stakeholder groups. Groups are consulted and their needs assessed. Everyone gets involved in realizing the vision.

Its goal is to create an ongoing cycle of planning, assessment, and decision making. Assessment is built into every project and operation, for everything done is judged against the organization's mission statement and strategic goals. As assessment data come in and new environmental factors are scanned, the strategic goal-setting cycle

continues. Ideally, the process becomes so ingrained that analytical, proactive, future-oriented thinking ("strategic management") becomes part of all managers' behavior.

It optimizes use of limited resources. No agency has unlimited resources or finances--certainly not the public schools. Schools are very complex organizations that must make spending decisions on everything from large buildings to staff, to pencils, to violins for the music department. With an overall "strategic vision" as guide, wiser allocations of funds and efforts can be made.

It helps organizations to make rational decisions. After a thorough scan of the environment, there will be few unknowns left to take the organization by surprise. Threats to the organization's survival, opportunities for its growth, and impacts of various social and economic trends will have been identified and calmly assessed. The organization won't then waste energy and resources over-reacting to minor matters.

It increases sensitivity to client needs. Schools have many clients: students, parents, staff, and community. Determining the needs of these groups is an important part of data collection and scanning in strategic planning. How well the final plan meets targeted needs is an important question in assessment.

It highlights the crucial importance of good information for decision making. It promotes information seeking and the ongoing collection of important management data.

It creates an organization-wide mission (or vision) that directs, motivates, and inspires different units to work together for the common good. Each unit (school, department) adopts the strategic goals and mission statement, implementing them through their own program planning. This combination of central direction with unit autonomy represents "loose-tight" management, which is highlighted in the research on effective schools, transformational leadership, and corporate excellence. Having a common sense of their school district's direction and purpose can help school and community members work together for the most constructive results.

Strategic planning is a proven corporate management system that reflects several of the qualities identified by Peters and Waterman in In Search of Excellence: a bias for action; close to the customer; hands-on, value-driven style; and simultaneous loose-tight properties. This planning model can help educators to begin proactively managing change, instead of being managed by it.

STEP #1: SELECTING TEAM MEMBERS

PROCESS

GOAL: *To compile a list of 12 to15 planning team members who are committed to strategic planning, and who represent a cross section of "stakeholders."*

SPECIAL MATERIALS NEEDED:

None

TIPS:

- A strategic planning team needs members who are energetic, dependable, knowledgeable--and compatible. You will be "living with" this team for a long time. Select carefully!

OUTCOME/PRODUCT: You have a strategic planning team!

1. Meet with the superintendent and Board president to get names of potential planning team members who represent a cross section of "stakeholders."

See Recommended Composition of Planning Team, page 21.

At this time, the superintendent and Board should plan policy on such matters as release time/compensation for district employees who are selected to join the strategic planning team. Questions about these policies surely will come up as soon as employees are asked to serve.

2. Contact prospective members by telephone.

Tell them they have been recommended by the superintendent to serve on a strategic planning team for the district. Tell them about the importance of the activity, the amount of time they will be committing, and what will be expected of them. If their response is positive, or that they "have to think about it," tell them they will be receiving a letter and a short reading on the process, and that you will call them back in a week or so. (See Sample Letter to Prospective Team Members, page 24, and Strategic Planner's Notebook #1.)

3. Mail the letter and Strategic Planner's Notebook #1 to prospective members of the planning team.

4. Select three alternative dates for the planning team orientation meeting.

5. Call each prospective team member to verify commitment. Get an informal reaction to the alternative dates for the orientation meeting.

6. Re-cycle the above process until the planning team list is finalized.

7. Meet with the superintendent to discuss the final list. Give him/her a copy to include in the next Board meeting packet.

8. Set a date, time, and location for the meeting and notify all who will attend.

STEP #1: INFORMATION SHEET

RECOMMENDED COMPOSITION OF PLANNING TEAM

The planning team, under the leadership of the superintendent and under the guidance of the process manager, is the heart of the strategic planning process.

The "right size" for a strategic planning team varies from organization to organization, but most of the literature on strategic planning agrees that, the best team is composed of no fewer than twelve and no more than twenty members. We suggest a team of twelve, having observed that the larger the team, the harder it is to keep people actively involved. It is not unheard-of for thirty or forty people to request membership on the strategic planning team. If this is the case in your district, we recommend that you harness this enthusiasm by making liberal use of task forces, study groups, and resource teams; but we also recommend that you limit the core team to no more than twelve. (Task forces, study groups and resource teams can also broaden participation in very large districts, where the twelve core members cannot totally represent all interested groups.)

The planning team should consist of the superintendent, at least one Board member, the chief financial officer, and a mix of the following: principals, district administrators, teachers, union officers, classified employees, parents, and business community persons. The superintendent has the power to appoint district employees to the team, and should draw a careful cross-section of instructional and non-instructional personnel, who represent the unique structure and needs of the school district. Community members will be volunteers. The superintendent and Board president certainly will know the community leaders who have a strong interest in working with the district.

Following are suggested members of the planning team:

- Board members
- superintendent
- chief financial officer

- other district administrators, such as a division head, curriculum developer, or personnel officer
- principals
- teachers
- classified district employees
- representatives of employees' union(s)
- parents, perhaps active in the PTA
- members of the business community
- other, ideally someone with a research background who can serve as a resource person, or someone talented in locating information, such as a school or public librarian

In some cases, of course, a team member might fill two roles, such as teacher/resource person or parent/business person or teacher/union representative, thus leaving room for additional members who might strengthen the team. The rationale for these "types" follows:

Board members are needed to enlist formal board support, which is crucial throughout the process.

The superintendent must provide direct and active leadership throughout the development of the strategic plan.

The chief financial officer is able to provide and interpret needed budget figures and projections.

An administrator will function as an extension of the superintendent, and should wear his/her "total organization" hat, rather than that of the specific function s/he represents in the district.

School principals are the district's front line leaders. They will likely be writing the action plans that implement the directions developed by the strategic planning team. Therefore, it is important to have a site manager's viewpoint during the developmental stages of the strategic plan.

Teachers form the heart of the organization, and, together with members from the administration, will be responsible for carrying out much of the finished plan at their schools.

Classified district employees are an often-neglected, but critically important, element in district operations. They too need a voice in setting directions for their organization, and they have a unique perspective to offer.

Since unions can be pivotal in the implementation of any plan, and since union contracts can impact on resource allocation plans, it is advisable to have a union officer or representative on the team from the outset.

Parents have yet another view of the schools, a view that can have significant impact on planning. Some educators believe that they can't be really honest about school problems when parents and community members are present, but parents and community members often make strong team members.

Persons from the business community, perhaps someone from the Chamber of Commerce or a business service club, can contribute valuable advice.

Other possible members to consider for the strategic planning team include recent graduates of district schools and/or an educator from a neighboring institution that has completed a strategic plan.

Absolute criteria for the selection of team members include: ability to attend scheduled meetings; ability to work within a group; dependability and reliability in preparing for meetings; ability to bring to the group creativity, problem solving skills, good will, and respect for colleagues; and a genuine interest in the future of the schools in the district.

STEP #1:

SAMPLE LETTER TO PROSPECTIVE TEAM MEMBERS

(ON DISTRICT LETTERHEAD)

Dear _____:

I would like to invite you to serve on the district strategic planning team. Should you elect to serve, you will find yourself involved in an exciting process--that of guiding the _____ District as it heads toward Year 2000. You will be serving with approximately eleven other members: myself, board members, parents, teachers, administrators, other district personnel, and business persons--all "stakeholders" in the future of education here in our community.

It is a heavy commitment. The team members will determine the frequency and length of meetings, but most strategic planning teams meet once or twice a month for two or three hours. There might even be some all-day retreats. This commitment might last as long as a year.

Attached is an overview of strategic planning to help you reach your decision.

You would make a strong member for our team. I hope you will accept this invitation to serve your district. _____ (name of the process manager) will telephone you in a few days to answer any questions you might have. In the meantime, please feel free to call me at (___) XXX-XXXX.

I look forward to talking to you.

Sincerely,

_____

Superintendent

GETTING READY FOR STEP #2

- Develop agenda for Step #2: Orientation Meeting.
- Purchase new, matching 3-ring binders to distribute to team members.
- Prepare for the superintendent any necessary progress report for presentation to the Board.
- Mail to all team members:
  - Next meeting's agenda (including date, time, and location of meeting);
  - Strategic Planner's Notebook #2: Background for Orientation Meeting.

STRATEGIC PLANNER'S NOTEBOOK #2:

BACKGROUND FOR ORIENTATION MEETING

What is Strategic Planning?

Strategic planning is a method for developing a new vision and new goals for a school district. It involves a representative planning team of twelve to fifteen people which meets at set intervals over a year. Using a ten-step process, it examines the district's values and capabilities; defines its "mission"; and considers the social, political, and economic environment in which it functions.

Having gathered and studied this information about where and what the district is now, the planning team develops a "vision" of where the district should be in the next three to five years and then selects "strategies" for getting it there. This vision and strategic plan are shared with all members and "stakeholders" in the district, particularly with district employees, who will use it to guide their work in the schools.

Your Role as a Strategic Planner for the School District

Strategic planning is participative planning. You will be asked to contribute your individual creativity, special perspective, and common sense to the planning process, but you will also be asked to make a commitment to teamwork--to working as a unit with other team members, in a fair, objective fashion, to reach a consensus.

To do justice to your teammates and to the process, it is important that you attend and participate in all meetings and complete whatever tasks or "homework" are assigned. There is no need to worry about learning the process in advance; the steps of the strategic planning process will be explained to you as they occur, through Strategic Planner's Notebook pages like this one.

The first step in the strategic planning process consists of an orientation meeting, in which you will become acquainted with your fellow team members and begin the process of forging yourselves into a working team.

STEP #2: CONDUCTING AN ORIENTATION MEETING

PROCESS

GOAL: *To introduce planning team members to each other and to the process they will follow. To begin team building. To gain member commitment to the planning team.*

SPECIAL MATERIALS NEEDED:

- Overheads from pages 30-32 (if desired) for reviewing the strategic planning process.
- A new, empty three-ring binder for each team member (perhaps with the district name or a logo), in which each member may keep the Strategic Planner's Notebook pages and their paperwork.

TIPS:

- The main focus of this meeting is on team building, so it is important that the environment be warm and friendly. Every team member should feel included and important.
- The new binders for holding Strategic Planner's Notebook pages and other papers represent a small "thank you in advance" gift to team members and are a symbol of their membership on the team.

OUTCOME/PRODUCT: A committed team ready to begin the strategic planning process. An initial meeting schedule and ground rules agreed to by team members. A first step in publicity through a press release announcing the team and its purpose.

1. Provide a welcome and introductions.

Thank members for participating. Conduct a "get acquainted" exercise or "ice breaker." Introduce district staff or any others who will be supporting the team.

2. Explain why and how the district decided on strategic planning.

Have the superintendent express the district's commitment and thanks; give the Board of Education's formal charge to the team.

3. Review the strategic planning process.

You may use the enclosed overheads, which correspond to the overview given in Strategic Planner's Notebook #1 (mailed to prospective team members in Step #1). Allow time for team members' questions or comments.

4. Explain the training process.

The model used in this guide calls for a "learn-as-you-go" approach. Rather than attending a preliminary training session, team members will learn about each step in the process at the time it occurs. They will receive a Strategic Planner's Notebook page explaining the upcoming step.

At this point, give out the Strategic Planner's Notebook binders.

5. Decide on dates for the next few meetings.

As noted in the Introduction, it is impossible to lay out a firm advance schedule for the entire planning year, since teams vary in their speed and in the frequency with which they are able to meet. But you can, at this point, get the team members to agree in general on the preferred frequency, length, and location of meetings. Certain days of the week may be impossible for some members. The team may decide that daytime work sessions are preferable to weekday evening meetings. Some may prefer an occasional all-day retreat.

With these guidelines in mind, get agreement on the date for the first meeting of Step #3 and tentatively set a few meetings after that.

The Board of Education's charge to the team probably includes a date by which the strategic plan should be finished and reported to the Board. If it does not, you should work with the superintendent to set a completion date. You will not be able to firmly schedule the whole process in advance, but your "final date" and the timeline in Appendix G should help you to monitor your progress.

It is difficult to predict how many meetings any one step will take. (NOTE: Steps #4, #5, #6, and #9 are the most complex and may take longer than the others.) The precise scheduling of upcoming steps and meetings will have to be an ongoing process.

6. Help the team set its ground rules.

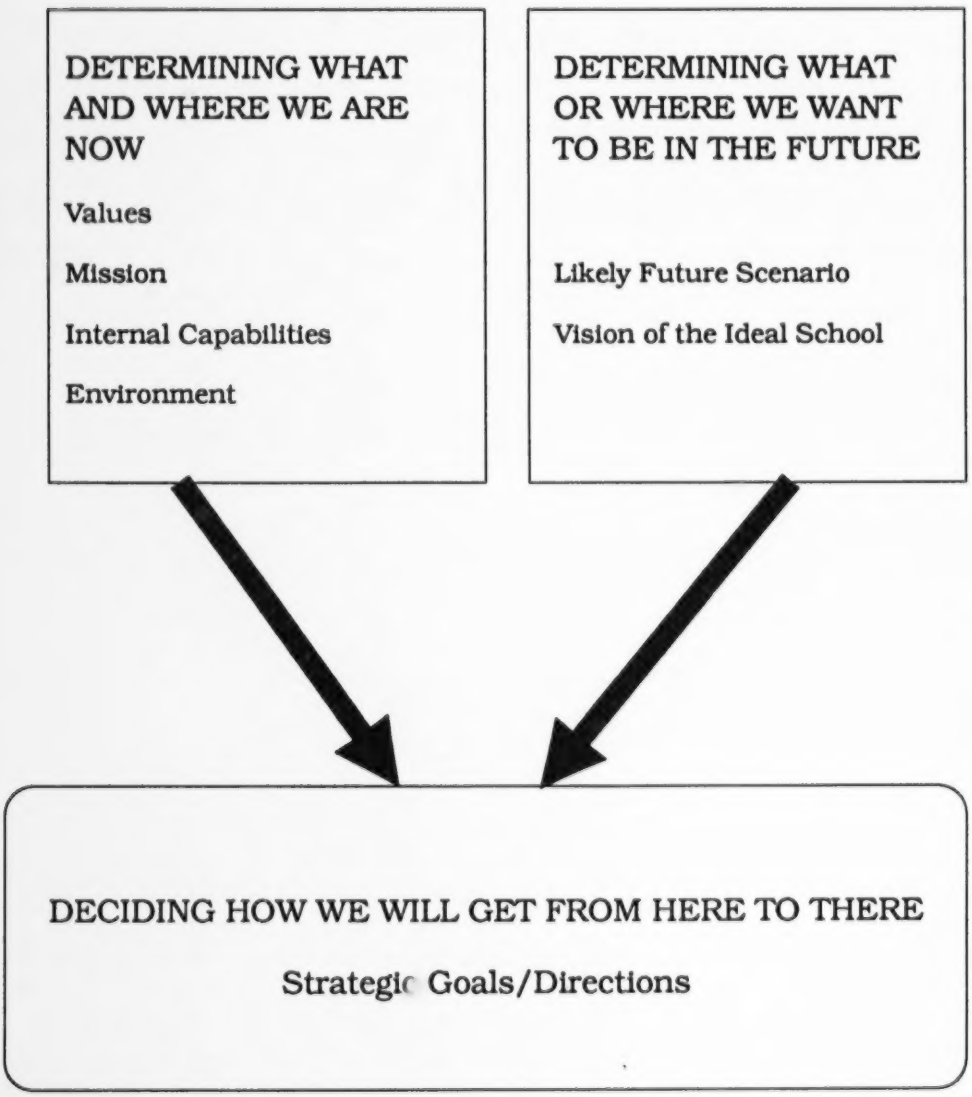
Team operating rules cover such matters as: calling the process manager if you must miss a meeting, or coming prepared for each session. Members are more likely to follow and enforce group rules if they have a hand in creating them. They can brainstorm a list of rules. See Appendix A on good meeting techniques for starter ideas.

7. Ask members for final commitment.

Explain that you will be sending out a press release announcing the strategic planning process and listing them as the team members. Remind them that--as always--you'll mail them all pertinent materials well before the next meeting.

Overhead #1

TASKS IN THE STRATEGIC PLANNING PROCESS


DETERMINING WHAT AND WHERE WE ARE NOW
Values
Mission
Internal Capabilities
Environment
DETERMINING WHAT OR WHERE WE WANT TO BE IN THE FUTURE
Likely Future Scenario
Vision of the Ideal School
DECIDING HOW WE WILL GET FROM HERE TO THERE
Strategic Goals/Directions

Overhead #2

STEPS IN THE STRATEGIC PLANNING PROCESS

- Step #1: Selecting Team Members
- Step #2: Conducting an Orientation Meeting
- Step #3: Clarifying Organizational Values
- Step #4: Developing a Mission Statement
- Step #5: Scanning the External Environment
- Step #6: Scanning the Internal Environment
- Step #7: Developing A Surprise-free Scenario
- Step #8: Creating a Vision
- Step #9: Building Strategic Goals
- Step #10: Gaining Board Approval
- Afterwards: Putting the Plan to Work

Overhead #3

ADVANTAGES OF STRATEGIC PLANNING

- A Proactive Approach to Change
- Creative and Innovative
- Flexible and Lean
- "Top Down" and "Bottom Up" Management
- Ongoing
- Optimized Use of Limited Resources
- Rational Decisions
- Sensitivity to Client Needs
- Information for Decision Making
- Common Vision and Inspiration

STEP #2:

SAMPLE PRESS RELEASE

Date:_____

The _____ School District is beginning a planning process that will help it to better serve students, better use its tax funds, and better plan for the future. It is borrowing a management technique from private industry called "strategic planning."

Under this system, a planning team made up of school and community leaders will examine the district and the environment in which it functions, taking into account local and national trends that affect the way education is conducted in the school district. Then the strategic planning team will draw up a "vision" of what they think the district should become in the next three to five years and design "strategies" for getting it there. Once adopted by the Board of Education, this "strategic vision" will serve as the touchstone for district activities; it will help to keep all programs accountable and on target.

The planning team is headed by _____. [List and describe members, e.g. "Mr. Franklin Jones, school board member and parent of a sixth grader at Wilson Middle School."]

GETTING READY FOR STEP #3

- Use the sample press release, or write your own. Complete it with the names and brief backgrounds of team members.
- Secure the superintendent's approval of the press release and send it to the community press and to schools in the district. (Suggest to the latter that they include it in the PTA and school newsletters).
- Find and make copies of present district philosophy, goal, mission, or value statements for team members to study in Step #3.
- Ask the superintendent to lead (at the first meeting for Step #3) a discussion of any philosophy or values statements under which the district currently operates, perhaps explaining how these statements were developed.
- Prepare for the superintendent any necessary progress report for presentation to the Board.
- Mail to all team members:
  - Next meeting's agenda (including date, time, and location of meeting);
  - Strategic Planner's Notebook #3: Clarifying Organizational Values;
  - Typed copy of agreed-upon team ground rules and any firmly settled meeting dates.

STRATEGIC PLANNER'S NOTEBOOK #3:

CLARIFYING ORGANIZATIONAL VALUES

Organizations have "values," just as individuals do. In this step of the strategic planning process, the planning team will determine the current values of the school district so that team members have a common base of knowledge and understanding on which to build realistic goals for the district's schools.

The process will begin with an examination of "philosophy" statements previously developed by the district. However, you should not feel limited to these; there may be unwritten values that will have a direct impact on further planning efforts.

To clarify organizational values, consider questions such as the following: What kind of work environment do we provide for both certificated and classified staff? Where does technology fit into our programs? What kinds of instructional supplies and resources do we provide our schools? What roles do our principals play in school governance?

These and other questions should be explored in order to ascertain what is really valued by the district. It is important to remember that, during this phase of the process, you are concerned only with what district values <u>are</u>, not what they <u>will</u> be, or what they <u>should</u> be. The focus is on the present. You will have the opportunity to "blue sky" in terms of values (the "should be's") later on in the process.

Also, the planning team must look at "congruence" between stated values and actions. If, for example, the district states that computer literacy is important, but has no computers, values and actions are not congruent.

The result of this step will be an agreed-upon list of current organizational values.

STEP #3: CLARIFYING ORGANIZATIONAL VALUES

PROCESS

GOAL: *To generate a list of current organizational values.*

SPECIAL MATERIALS NEEDED:

- Copies of present district philosophy, goal, mission, or value statements.
- Copies of a dictionary definition of "values" to hand out to the group.
- Copies of Sample Values Statements, page 40.

TIPS:

- Keep the pace brisk. Don't let the team focus on personalities, individual schools, or programs. Keep a broad perspective. Have the team focus on present values, not on "what was" or "what should be."
- Although the team will review present philosophy/value statements, they aren't limited to those. Oftentimes, "unwritten" values are just as important as those committed to paper.

OUTCOME/PRODUCT: A succinct, agreed-upon list describing current organizational values.

1. Define "Values."

Have the team come to consensus around a definition of "values." (You might want to use a dictionary definition as a discussion starter.) Include in the discussion the following: Why are values important? How important are "unwritten values" to a school system? How are values determined? (See Appendix D for suggestions on gaining consensus.) Write the team's definition on a piece of butcher paper and put it on the wall for future reference.

2. Review district philosophy statement(s) and/or values statement(s), with the superintendent--if agreeable--leading the discussion.

3. Discuss the district philosophy and values.

Consider the district values/philosophy in light of the definition developed in the first step. Do existing values/philosophy statements cover everything that the team has defined as "values"? Are there other areas of "values" that need to be explored or clarified?

Have the team read and briefly discuss the Sample Values Statements, page 40.

4. Brainstorm a list of values currently operating within the district.

Have the team brainstorm a list of values ideas currently operating in the district. (See Appendix C for tips for brainstorming). Clarify any vague items on the list and combine like items into one statement. Make sure that everyone understands each concept listed. If not, gain clarity and rewrite as necessary.

5. Begin to write values statements.

Break into two small groups. Assign each group an equal number of values ideas. Each group is responsible for writing a value statement around each of its ideas. Each group should be in consensus around each of its value statements.

6. Bring the two small groups back together.

Have one person from each group report out its value statements. Write the statements on a fresh sheet of butcher paper. List out all value statements before allowing discussion to take place.

7. Clarify any vague statements.

Ask if there is need to clarify any of the statements. Go down the list of statements one by one to give people a further opportunity to seek clarification. Make sure everyone has the same understanding of the meaning of each statement.

8. Gain consensus around the value statements.

The team may have to re-word some of the value statements in order to gain consensus. If there is reluctance to accept a statement, ask "Can you live with what's been written?" If everyone can live with it, then you have consensus.

9. Review the final list of value statements.

This is a way of summarizing and concluding the session.

STEP #3: INFORMATION SHEET

SAMPLE VALUES STATEMENTS

We support school-site management, based on the belief that principals and teachers are skilled professionals who deserve the maximum possible autonomy within legal district guidelines.

We view our personnel resources as assets to the organization, and give the same consideration to these assets as is given to other important issues.

We value maintaining and enhancing our reputation for excellence within the community.

We promote success for both students and employees, based on the belief that everyone can make a difference, and we set high expectations for ourselves and others.

We develop students' ability to effectively use technology to solve problems and to use information; we encourage their higher level thinking skills.

We set clear and concise goals that reflect the aspirations of students, parents, community, and staff.

We directly involve parents, staff, and community in the decisions at the local school level; we promote business, school, and community partnerships.

We use community resources to enhance school curriculum and provide for the needs of students.

We support flexibility in order to meet changing student needs.

We establish priorities within the school curriculum to ensure that students receive those learnings that are most important.

GETTING READY FOR STEP #4

- Prepare for the superintendent any necessary progress report for presentation to the Board.
- Mail to all team members:
  - Next meeting's agenda (including date, time, location of meeting);
  - Strategic Planner's Notebook #4: Developing a Mission Statement;
  - Typed copy of the values statements;
  - Describing Your District's Mission Worksheet, page 46;
  - Sample Mission Statements, pages 47-49.

STRATEGIC PLANNER'S NOTEBOOK #4:

DEVELOPING A MISSION STATEMENT

A mission statement is the "what we believe" statement around which people can organize their energies and efforts. It forms the foundation for the rest of the strategic plan and provides a common vision for the total organization. It is a succinct description of why the schools in the district exist. Detailed objectives, implementation strategies, and tactical plans are built upon the foundation of the basic purposes and mission of the organization.

The mission statement is a touchstone against which all other planning steps can be tested for relevance. Some of the literature on strategic planning suggests that one should develop the mission statement after goals are developed; some suggests that it precede most other activities. The strategic planning process the district is following subscribes to the latter school of thought, for the following reason:

The future of the schools in the district is determined in great part by where they are now, on the identity that distinguishes them from other schools. Their basic "identities" are not going to change much, because they are legally required to operate in certain ways and to accomplish certain tasks. A mission statement is an honest expression of a school or district's basic identity. Consequently, the development of a mission statement comes between the clarification of values and the steps which scan the environments in which the district exists.

The importance of a realistic and meaningful mission statement is underscored by Tregoe and Zimmerman in Top Management Strategy: What It Is and How To Make It Work, when they say, "If an organization is headed in the wrong direction, the last thing it needs is to get there more efficiently."

The result of this step will be a living statement that answers the questions: What business are we in? What is our basic purpose? Who are our clients? What are our major activities or services?

STEP #4: DEVELOPING A MISSION STATEMENT

PROCESS

GOAL: *To develop a statement, through brainstorming and consensus, around which people can organize their energies and efforts.*

SPECIAL MATERIALS NEEDED:

- 12 sheets of butcher paper (three for each of the four questions in Describing Your District's Mission Worksheet, page 46) taped to walls. Sheets should be headed with each of the four questions.
- Extra copies of Values Statements developed at the previous meeting.
- Copies of the Drafting Your District's Mission Statement Worksheet, page 50, and of the Sample Mission Statements beginning on page 47.
- Butcher paper headed with the definition of a mission statement: "A mission statement is the "what we believe" statement around which people can organize their energies and efforts. It is a succinct description of why the schools in the district exist, their purposes and objectives."

TIPS:

- A facilitator is highly desirable, to help the team reach consensus on key issues and to help guide the process of drafting a mission statement.
- This important step should be handled in a pleasant, low-key, relaxed manner.
- If the strategic planning team is having a hard time getting started with a mission statement, give them copies of Drafting Your District's Mission Statement, page 50, to help get them "unstuck."

OUTCOME/PRODUCT: A written mission statement.

1. Review the value statements previously developed.

As a springboard for developing the mission statement, review the value statements. This is not the focus activity of the process, but can serve as an "icebreaker" and a lead-in to the development of a mission statement.

2. Present the definition of a mission statement written on butcher paper. (See Special Materials Needed section.)

Have the team discuss and understand the definition of a mission statement as provided.

3. Compile the answers to the "Describing Your District's Mission" worksheet.

On the walls, have four sets of butcher paper taped up, each headed with a question from the worksheet. Have team members rotate between all four, writing their answers in summary form. If a similar answer is already written up, instruct members to put a check mark next to that idea.

4. Review the answers listed on the butcher paper.

Question by question, go over the answers listed on each sheet of butcher paper. Combine similar answers by writing them on fresh sheets of butcher paper. Clarify any vague language.

5. Gain consensus around key issues raised for each question.

Have the team come to consensus on three to four key areas per question. These key areas will form the basis for the mission statement.

6. Review the Sample Mission Statements, pages 47-49.

Have the group quickly read and review the sample statements. Tell the group that these are provided as examples only.

7. Distribute copies of Drafting Your District's Mission Statement, page 50 and begin drafting statements.

Break the team into two small groups. Each group is to draft a mission statement. Keep all the butcher paper with the worksheet answers in clear view for the groups to refer to. Indicate they may want to work with the worksheet but that it is not necessary. Have each group write its draft language on butcher paper.

8. Reconvene the whole team.

Have someone from each group report out its draft language for the mission statement. Ask a team member to suggest wording for a mission statement that captures the important concepts of both drafts, while a recorder writes the ideas on butcher paper. Have the team suggest revisions, deletions, or additions until the group is satisfied that the new draft captures the important issues agreed upon earlier. If the group is floundering and unable to agree upon language, have one volunteer take all the materials developed to this point, go off, and write up the mission statement, to present to the team at its next meeting.

9. Continue working on the draft mission statement until consensus is reached.

Once the language of the mission statement is agreed to, have someone write it up clearly on butcher paper. Keep this sheet posted at subsequent meetings for easy reference.

10. Inform team members that the finished mission statement will be approved by the Board before Step #5.

Because the mission statement becomes official district policy, it must be approved by the Board of Education.

STEP #4: WORKSHEET

DESCRIBING YOUR DISTRICT'S MISSION

A mission statement is based on a common point of view about the reason for the school district's existence. As you prepare to write one --with the planning team--you need to clarify your thoughts about the district. The questions below should help you do this. Not all responses will be included in the mission statement, but all will be considered seriously.

Please respond to the following questions independently of any other members of the planning team. (You may use separate sheets of paper.) Please be creative--"off-the-wall" even. Let's gather some fresh new perspectives. The obvious answer to "What business are we in?" is "to educate kids." But think beyond the obvious. What else do we do?

1. What business are we in?

2. What is our basic purpose?

3. Who are our clients?

4. What are our major activities or services?

STEP #4: INFORMATION SHEET

SAMPLE MISSION STATEMENTS

The following mission statements are provided not so your statement can be a carbon copy of one designed by others, but to provide samples that might stimulate your own thinking. Some are for corporations; some are for schools; one is for an educational information center; one is for a community theater group. Most are brief statements, followed by "specifically" or "in support of this" statements, which express district values or convictions in further detail.

Some very effective corporate mission statements have been summarized as slogans, like: "Quality is Job 1" or "Progress is our most important product" or "We try harder." Some are even reduced to symbols, like the lonely Maytag repairman. Keep in mind that the mission statement describes what you value, your purpose, why your organization exists. The clearer and more succinct it is, the better it can serve as a living "touchstone" for everyone involved with the district.

Mission Statement For A School District:

The XXX School District will work in partnership with parents and community to help youth develop a positive vision of the future and acquire the attitudes, knowledge and skills necessary to become successful, contributing participants in a rapidly changing world. In support of this, we are committed to:

- Providing a comprehensive and academically challenging educational program that responds to the unique and changing needs of students.
- Promoting student gains in achievement that are measured in a balanced fashion using a variety of assessment tools.
- Pursuing partnerships with parents, community members, business, and other agencies to ensure broad participation in education.
- Enhancing the educational environment through involvement in the political and legislative process at the local, state, and national levels.

- Increasing the financial resources of the district to optimize the educational and support programs.

Mission Statement For An Educational Information Center:
Based on the belief that the effectiveness of education depends in large part upon the full use of available knowledge and resources by those involved in the educational process, XXX's purposes are to promote the awareness that useful information on educational concerns and issues is widely and easily accessible, and to provide information services and resources to those concerned with education.

To best fulfill these purposes, XXX will operate under the following convictions:

- for the immediate future, the major clientele for educational information will continue to be the educational practitioner
- the usefulness of information to the client is determined by its timeliness and relevance
- given the interdependent nature of information services, XXX's ability to fulfill its purposes is highly dependent on close and continuing cooperation with other information agencies
- XXX can best provide information services if it maintains its credibility, visibility, and professionalism

(San Mateo County [CA] Office of Education)

Abridged Form Of Mission Statement From Edina School System:
General Purpose: to provide for publicly supported education programs for the citizens of our community.

Focus: to meet the educational needs of elementary and secondary school children through programs appropriate to their abilities and to provide for lifelong learning for adults in our district.

Program goals: (1) to develop the intellectual capacities of all students; (2) to help them learn to live as individuals in society; (3) to develop an understanding of the creative and performing arts; (4) to develop an understanding of the natural world and natural science; and (5) to develop skills applicable to all learning.

(Executive Educator 3/84)

Sample Mission Statement Of A County:

The mission of XXX county is to economically and efficiently provide and manage delivery systems for diverse programs and services to meet basic human needs. In support of this, we are committed to:

- serving as an agent for the federal and state governments to fulfill mandated programs
- providing optional community services as determined by the county board
- providing programs and services in the most cost-effective manner
- encouraging citizen awareness, participation, and involvement in county government
- utilizing community resources as a vehicle for good government

(Below et al, The Executive Guide to Strategic Planning)

Mission Statement From A Theater Arts Group:

The mission of the XXX is to provide theater experiences that are educational, enlightening, and enriching for both audience and production participants. In support of this mission, we are committed to:

- Providing educational theater by (1) offering a wide and diverse program of drama and musicals, including contemporary as well as traditional and classical, and socially relevant as well as entertaining, productions; (2) making participation in theater productions open to all interested parties; and (3) by providing artist training programs.
- Providing enlightening theater by (1) opening new fields of thought and opportunities for growth; (2) exposing people to things they would not otherwise experience; (3) increasing career opportunities for artists.
- Providing enriching theater by (1) offering a wide array of plays that afford entertainment, escape, relaxation, reflection, and a change of pace; (2) creating and performing new works; and (3) providing theater as social commentary.

STEP #4: WORKSHEET

DRAFTING YOUR DISTRICT'S MISSION STATEMENT

Based on the belief that _____
_____,
the purposes of the _____District are to
_____, to
_____, and to
_____.

To best fulfill these purposes, the _____ District will operate under the following convictions:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____

The purpose of the _____District is to
_____
_____, and
_____, and
_____, by providing
_____, and
_____.

In support of this, we are committed to:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____

GETTING READY FOR STEP #5

- Make certain the Board has adopted the mission statement.
- Mail to all team members:
  - Next meeting's agenda (including date, time, and location of meeting);
  - Strategic Planner's Notebook #5: Scanning the External Environment;
  - Scanning the External Environment Worksheet, page 58;
  - Typed copy of completed mission statement.

STRATEGIC PLANNER'S NOTEBOOK #5:

SCANNING THE EXTERNAL ENVIRONMENT

No organization exists in a vacuum. Outside events and other organizations always affect it. In scanning the external environment, you will be identifying and assessing these outside impacts on the district. External impacts that are not identified cannot be acted upon; they can only exist as unseen threats or missed opportunities.

You are free to look at the international, national, state/regional, and local scenes for trends that influence what the district is doing or what it needs to be doing. Look for trends that will make the school district's future significantly different from its past or present. Examples might be: changing pupil characteristics, new economic realities, laws or court decisions, new research on teaching.

The first task of the planning team will be to brainstorm a list of trends or issues and to select a limited number to study. A worksheet is attached to assist you in organizing your thoughts before the brainstorming session.

To work with any issue, the team needs a common base of knowledge about it. Some issues may be quite familiar; others may require study, background reading, or information-gathering. A series of study sessions will be held to review each issue separately and to brainstorm its implications for the school district.

This is a fascinating process, but the team cannot become so absorbed in studying issues that it never gets back to strategic planning! It is also good to remember that there may be issues on which some or all members hold very strong views--drugs, family values, and morals are likely candidates. It is important to maintain objectivity.

The result of this step will be a list of issues and their implications for the school district. Findings are often phrased as "threats" to the health of the district and "opportunities" for district growth or innovation. Maintaining creativity and an open perspective can sometimes turn "threats" into "opportunities."

STEP #5: SCANNING THE EXTERNAL ENVIRONMENT

PROCESS

GOAL: *To determine external threats/opportunities to the district through selection and analysis of relevant political, demographic, economic, technological, and social trends and issues.*

SPECIAL MATERIALS NEEDED:

- Depending on issues selected and team needs, articles and research reports may need to be gathered or written and/or experts engaged to speak to the team.

TIPS:

- The key to this step is to let people and ideas range freely, without losing sight of the purpose of the exercise and the need to be efficient. It is easy for members to become fascinated by certain issues, or the study process itself, or to spend too much time trying to draw all possible implications out of an issue. It may be necessary at times to diplomatically cut off discussion and call for a "best guess," so that the team can move on.
- Because of the difficulties of keeping the group on task and the dangers of strong emotions interfering with group objectivity, it is highly recommended that a neutral meeting facilitator be engaged for this step.
- One purpose of doing the external scan at this point is to give team members practice in objective analysis before they do the internal scan, which--being closer to home--is even more likely to generate off-task behavior and emotional subjectivity.

OUTCOME/PRODUCT: A report on external issues ("threats" and "opportunities") and their implications for the school district.

First Meeting:

1. Brainstorm, with the aid of members' worksheets, the issues the team will consider in the external scan.

Write all ideas on butcher paper, grouping like items. (For example, local housing patterns, two-career families, and immigration might be grouped under a study heading of "Changes in the Local Population.") Don't worry if you have several issues in one worksheet category and none at all in another--the only concern is listing the issues your team considers important.

If the list runs longer than ten separate issues, try grouping similar items into even larger categories or agreeing that some issues are less important and may be dropped. Otherwise, the study of these issues could take years!

2. Considering each issue separately, decide how the team will develop a common base of knowledge about it.

First, separate out issues that the team feels they know enough about to work on without background study. Then, for each of the remaining issues, decide on a learning approach. There are several options: the team members may simply discuss the issue and share their current knowledge; a team member or district staff person may volunteer to prepare a background report; someone may be designated to collect a few pertinent articles and distribute them to the team; or an expert may be engaged to speak to the team.

3. Based on the learning approaches selected, schedule subsequent study meetings with the group.

Agree on ground rules, such as "oral reports will take no more than 15 minutes" or "written reports--maximum five pages--will be completed and mailed at least one week prior to the study session."

When you schedule the study sessions, you might calculate--as a very general rule of thumb--about two hours for each issue. Be sure to provide adequate lead time, if reports must be written or guest speakers engaged.

ALTERNATE METHOD: While it is helpful to the "common knowledge base" that all team members study and consider the implications of each issue, you may split the team into small groups that study different issues simultaneously. The small groups report back to the whole team, summarizing their knowledge of the issue and presenting the implications they've drawn for the district. The full team then discusses and approves their findings.

Study Sessions:

4. Begin the study of each issue with the background information--either an oral presentation or discussion of readings--so that team members share a common base of knowledge. Then open the floor to brainstorming about its implications for the district.

BRAINSTORMING - METHOD #1: Threat/opportunity analysis. Have a piece of butcher paper prepared for the issue under study, with the issue's title and a column each for "threats" and "opportunities":

SAMPLE

ISSUE: Changing community demographics

THREATS	OPPORTUNITIES
Rising home prices are keeping young families out of older neighborhoods.	A new townhome development will increase enrollment at South School.

BRAINSTORMING - METHOD #2: Implications analysis. For each issue, brainstorm the implications for the district, without worrying if they are "threats" or "opportunities":

SAMPLE

ISSUE: Changing community demographics

ISSUE	IMPLICATIONS
#1 - Rising home prices are keeping young families out of older neighborhoods.	#1 - Consider lease or reuse of Center School.
#2 - A new townhome development will increase enrollment at South School.	#2 - Complete previously deferred maintenance at South. #2 - Redraw boundaries or redistribute grade levels to smooth enrollment shift from Center to South.

5. Between study sessions, organize materials and coordinate the study effort.

After you finish the study session on each issue, recopy the results neatly onto butcher paper to hang at future study sessions. Something that occurs at a later session may trigger the group to revise its thinking on an earlier issue.

Coordinate the study effort, or keep in touch with the person who is doing so: ensure that readings are mailed to team members well in advance, assist with research efforts (see pages 59-60 for suggested research resources), engage guest speakers.

Final Meeting(s):

6. Compile the separate issues lists into a coherent whole.

Review all issue sheets and, as a group, come to consensus. Some issues or implications may seem more important now than they originally did; others may no longer seem important at all. Take time as a group to rethink the whole list, "pruning" or refining as needed.

Decide how to summarize this information for the team record and, ultimately, for the Board report. For example, you might want a single list of threats and opportunities, a separate page on each issue, or a narrative of the team's predictions about community changes and their implications for the school district.

STEP #5: WORKSHEET

SCANNING THE EXTERNAL ENVIRONMENT

Listed here are five categories commonly considered in a strategic planning external scan. Under each are a few possible topics, to start you thinking about significant changes and trends that will make the school district's future different from its past or present.

POLITICS: international trouble spots, Star Wars/SDI, state politicians' agendas for education (e.g., reform, prayer in school, parental choice, accountability), local politics concerning the schools.

DEMOGRAPHICS: the aging of the American population, changing family structures (e.g., two-career families, single parent families, teen mothers), immigration, at-risk students, impact of the local housing/job market on types and numbers of families with children living in the school district.

THE ECONOMY: America's foreign trade deficit, the change from a factory economy to a service/information economy, local job opportunities.

TECHNOLOGY: space exploration; lifestyle changes resulting from computers, VCRs, genetic engineering, etc.; changing job markets and/or worker qualifications; new instructional tools for schools, such as computers, interactive video, and satellite transmission.

SOCIETAL VALUES: role of the family, rise/decline of religion, television violence, drugs, gang warfare, AIDS.

STEP #5: INFORMATION SHEET

POSSIBLE RESEARCH RESOURCES

The United Way--Many local United Way offices do their own strategic plans, including an external scan of the community. If the local office has done one and will let you use it, much of your data collection work may be completed. Other agencies that may have already completed an external scan of your community are: the Chamber of Commerce, local corporations, nearby school districts, the county or regional office of education, regional planning groups, economic development agencies.

The Chamber of Commerce--The Chamber can also provide data on local business trends.

Board of Realtors--This office will have the latest housing sales and availability figures for your town.

Politicians--Your local, state, and national elected representatives are usually eager to help you when you have questions. The public library or directory assistance can provide their telephone numbers.

Federal Information Centers--These centers are designed to easily link citizens to the proper federal agency when they need information. Your local center will be listed in the telephone directory under "Federal Government."

Regional, State, County Offices of Education--These agencies will be a prime source of enrollment data and projections, other statistics, and many forms of technical assistance, including (in many cases) a professional library of research/resources.

The Public Librarian--Your local librarian will be able to help you with all sorts of questions. The library is likely to have these and other reference books:

- *Reader's Guide to Periodical Literature* (or the computerized version *Infotrac*): a subject index to articles in news and general interest magazines, a source of readings on many social trends.

- *ERIC* and/or *Education Index*: indexes to articles in the professional literature of education.
- *City and County Data Book*: one of many reports from the U.S. Census Bureau that can help with various statistics.
- *Encyclopedia of Associations*: a directory of organizations and professional groups on every topic. These organizations may serve as sources of articles and reports or speakers.

GETTING READY FOR STEP #6

- Prepare for the superintendent any necessary progress report for presentation to the Board.
- Mail to all team members:
  - Next meeting's agenda (including date, time, and location of meeting);
  - Strategic Planner's Notebook #6: Scanning the Internal Environment;
  - Typed copy of the completed external scan report.

STRATEGIC PLANNER'S NOTEBOOK #6:

SCANNING THE INTERNAL ENVIRONMENT

The scan of the internal environment is similar to the external environment scan that you just completed, but the focus now is on the district itself. You will be discussing something you know well: your own district. You will, in effect, be taking a snapshot of the district, looking at it as a whole. You will be selecting broad categories or topics, gathering background information and acquiring knowledge in these areas, and then listing strengths and weaknesses for each area. These strengths and weaknesses, coupled with the threats and opportunities from the external scan, will help form a basis for the strategic goals you will develop later on.

Some areas that you will want to explore are: instructional programs, personnel, facilities, administration, students, community relations. One of your first tasks will be to adequately define, within each area, what the team needs to study. For example, a personnel issue might be the aging of the teaching force; the "students" issue might focus on levels of academic achievement in the district. Once these areas are defined, as with the external scan, you will need to gather additional information. Some possible methods for acquiring this information might be: bringing in district experts; reviewing student test score data; conducting faculty, staff, or community surveys (or reviewing surveys done previously). You will want to use whatever database of information the district has available.

During this phase, you must keep in mind that a global district perspective is needed. As with the external scan, you must be as dispassionate and neutral as possible for this portion of the strategic planning process to succeed. You are not looking to assign blame or point fingers for possible weaknesses or past failures; "personality" issues must be avoided. Rather, this is a chance to positively and objectively analyze the district, to realize where its strengths and weaknesses lie, and to prioritize areas that need attention if the district is to improve.

STEP #6: SCANNING THE INTERNAL ENVIRONMENT

PROCESS

GOAL: *To examine the district and to develop a list of key, critical internal strengths and weaknesses.*

SPECIAL MATERIALS NEEDED:

- Any available data on the district itself: test scores, budget, surveys, program quality review results, accreditation reports, etc.

TIPS:

- Keep the discussion focused on programs, not personalities. Keep discussions from turning into gripe sessions.
- This step will take several sessions to complete and the group may become impatient or bogged down in details. Set specific outcomes for each meeting held, so the group has a sense of accomplishment.

OUTCOME/PRODUCT: An agreed-upon list of key internal strengths and weaknesses.

First Meeting:

1. List the broad issues the team will consider in the internal scan.

Have the group brainstorm broad areas they would like to explore during this step. Some possibilities include: instructional programs, personnel, technology, students, administration, facilities, community relations, etc. Issues may cross over boundaries, so don't be too tightly bound to topic areas.

2. Specify what the team needs to study within each broad issue.

These should be fairly specific definitions that will determine what further information will be needed. For example, under "instructional programs," will the team consider all programs, including electives, or just concentrate on the 3Rs?

3. Decide the learning approach to be used for each issue.

Feel free to use the same approaches that you used for the external scan. Because you have a whole group of "experts" in the form of district personnel, you may want to make heavy use of focus groups, forums, staff reports, and other such input.

Again, you will want to agree on ground rules such as "oral reports will take no more than fifteen minutes" or "papers--maximum five pages--should be mailed to the team at least one week prior to the appropriate study session."

4. Based on the learning methods selected, schedule subsequent study meetings with the group.

Study Sessions:

5. Ensure that all team members receive all necessary materials in advance.

6. Discuss each topic at the agreed-upon meeting.

If you schedule more than one issue per meeting, consider them one at a time.

7. Brainstorm a list of perceived strengths and weaknesses around each topic area. (If the word "weaknesses" is a red flag for your team, use less value-laden terminology, such as "room for improvement.")

On butcher paper, create a side-by-side list:

SAMPLE

ISSUE: Personnel Issues

STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
Well defined promotion policy	Salaries low for area
Commitment to hiring dedicated professional staff	No coordinated staff development program

Go back and forth as ideas occur to members. When the group has exhausted all ideas, clarify items as necessary, and combine like items into one statement. Determine three to four key areas of priority for each broad issue. For example, one person may feel that lack of a uniform dress code for students is a weakness in the district. However, the team as a whole may decide that that isn't a key or critical issue in terms of the strategic planning process. (See Appendix E for a method of determining priorities.)

8. Continue this process until all issues have been discussed.

Brainstorm strengths and weaknesses for each broad issue area. Prioritize each list into three or four key areas. It doesn't matter if these are from the strengths or weaknesses column as long as everyone agrees that they are critical areas.

At the Final Meeting:

9. Join all the strengths/weaknesses lists into a single list.

Review all issues that have been discussed. Make sure there are no revisions/changes that the group wishes to make.

GETTING READY FOR STEP #7

- Prepare for the superintendent any necessary progress report for presentation to the Board.
- Mail to all team members:
  - Next meeting's agenda (including date, time, location of meeting);
  - Copy of Strategic Planner's Notebook #7: Developing a Surprise-free Scenario;
  - Typed copy of the final list of internal strengths and weaknesses.

STRATEGIC PLANNER'S NOTEBOOK #7:

DEVELOPING A SURPRISE-FREE SCENARIO

"How can we plan when things are changing so fast?" You may have heard this question at some point in the strategic planning process.

Although it is true that it is impossible to predict the future accurately (except perhaps for a select few whose predictions get written up in the tabloid press), it is necessary to at least make some assumptions about the future.

So far the team has scanned the internal and external environments. Now it is time to develop a surprise-free scenario that is based on what you've learned about the environment in which you live. A surprise-free scenario is a reasonable "guess." It allows the team to make some assumptions and to plan on that basis, rather than making many separate plans for "worst case" or "best case" scenarios.

The district already does enrollment projections, using formulas that help predict its enrollment future with some degree of confidence. No prediction of the future can be absolutely certain, but time and experience have made enrollment projection formulas good tools for school planning.

Surprise-free scenarios are something like enrollment projections; they are "best guesses" for the future based on professional knowledge and past experience.

The team will review the important threats/opportunities and strengths/weaknesses defined in the the internal and external scans. For each, the team will develop a realistic assumption about the future--a "surprise-free" statement.

STEP #7: DEVELOPING A SURPRISE-FREE SCENARIO

PROCESS

GOAL: *To develop a list of "assumptions" about what the community and district will look like in five years, based on what has been learned during the external and internal scans.*

SPECIAL MATERIALS NEEDED:

- Examples of Surprise-free Scenario Statements, page 72.

TIPS:

- Since this step undoubtedly will take more than one meeting, it would be helpful to type and mail to team members the results of each meeting so they can be thinking about educational trends between meetings.

OUTCOME/PRODUCT: A list of projections, or "assumptions," keyed to threats and opportunities developed in Step #5, and to strengths and weaknesses developed in Step #6.

1. Have team members refer to the results of the external scan (Step #5) and the internal scan (Step #6).

2. Identify the twelve to fifteen most important issues listed on the external scan (Step #5) and the internal scan (Step #6).

Have each team member, individually, asterisk each item s/he feels has very important implications for the future of the district, and check each item s/he feels is of lesser importance. If there is general agreement on the twelve to fifteen asterisked items, go on to step #3, below.

If there is disagreement, ask for volunteers to comment on each disputed item. There is no absolutely correct number of items with which to work, so there is no need to discuss items to death; however, attempt to get the list down to twelve to fifteen items.

3. Give an example of how to translate a scan statement into a "surprise-free" statement.

For example, suppose that one of your internal scan findings reveals that the median age of your teaching force is 58.5 years. From this you can draw the fairly "surprise-free" assumption that roughly half of your teachers will retire within the next five years. Of course this may not happen. The district could change its policy on retirement age, and no one might choose to retire. However, this is unlikely, and a reasonable assumption about the future--a surprise-free scenario statement--would be that roughly 50% of the teaching force will retire within the next five years.

Distribute copies of the information sheet on Surprise-free Scenarios, page 72, if you think team members would benefit from examples of statements from other agencies.

4. Develop "surprise-free" or assumption statements for each issue that the team has determined to be important.

Divide team members into pairs. Take the number of statements and divide by the number of two-person teams. Assign as equal a number of statements to the pairs as possible. (This sounds more compli-

cated than it really is. For example, fifteen statements divided by six two-person teams would mean that three teams would get two statements each and three teams would get three statements each.)

Have pairs develop and write on butcher paper surprise-free (or assumption) statements for each of their assigned issues.

Once all surprise-free scenario statements are completed, ask for a spokesperson from each pair to tell the whole team how the subgroup came to its conclusion. Allow time for discussion.

Make changes in wording as the team comes to agreement on each statement.

5. Finalize surprise-free scenario statements.

Once wording is agreed upon, have the results typed and sent to group members for a final review of language. These statements will play a very important part in the building of strategic goals (Step #9).

6. Prepare planning team members for beginning Step #8.

The next step in the strategic planning process is Developing a Vision. Tell the team that their "homework" for the next meeting is to think about what the ideal school or learning environment might look like. Ask them to talk to their kids or neighbors or community groups about the ideal school. There is no written assignment; they are simply supposed to "think."

Explain the role-playing exercise that will take place during Step #8, in which they may play the part of a student, teacher, etc. (See page 76 for details.) This will keep the role-playing activity from being threatening or surprising when it occurs.

STEP #7: INFORMATION SHEET

EXAMPLES OF SURPRISE-FREE SCENARIO STATEMENTS

These are examples of "surprise-free" scenario statements, sometimes called "assumption statements."

FROM A SCHOOL DISTRICT:

The district student population will increase by about 300 students over the next five years.

The district minority population will increase to 65%, and 60% of the student population will be Hispanic.

Families of students will be comprised primarily of people in blue collar occupations, with both parents working.

Drug and alcohol abuse in the schools will increase at the same proportional rate as in the greater society.

Twenty-five to thirty percent of this year's high school freshmen will not graduate.

FROM AN EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES CENTER:

Due to increased costs, decreasing enrollment, and voter trends, the financial situation in education will remain tight for at least the next five years.

There will be stabilization of state funding for education (relative to the last five years), with major control remaining at the State.

There will be no significant structural change in education, either in terms of governance or in school systems.

There will be no significant changes in the copyright law or the enforcement of it.

GETTING READY FOR STEP #8

- Prepare for the superintendent any necessary progress report for presentation to the Board.
- Mail to all team members:
  - Next meeting's agenda (including date, time, and location of meeting);
  - Strategic Planner's Notebook #8: Creating a Vision;
  - Typed copy of surprise-free scenario, or "assumption" statements, developed during Step #7.

STRATEGIC PLANNER'S NOTEBOOK #8:

CREATING A VISION

You have studied the world at large to develop your external scan; gathered, discussed, and analyzed materials to determine the strengths and weaknesses of your schools; and prepared your surprise-free scenario. You are now ready to embark on what many believe to be the most fun--and the most exciting--step of the strategic planning process: creating a vision of the ideal school of the future.

The purpose of this activity is to move you from the analytical, critical, evaluative modes in which you have been operating, to a more creative mode.

Up to this point, the district as a whole has been the focus of attention, and thoughts have been directed toward three to five years in the future. This exercise uses the far future (fifteen to twenty years) and focuses on an individual school. This is done to allow you to break free of the present and "imagine." When this "blue skying" exercise is finished, attention will return to the district and to the nearer future.

Once the team reaches a shared vision of the school of the future, the stage is set for developing realistic strategic goals. The point is to have an ideal goal to work toward and then to work backward to decide what must be done immediately to reach the long-range goal.

To envision the far future, you might ask, What will students be like? What will teachers be like? What will administrators be like? What will curriculum be like? What will school buildings be like? Will there be buildings at all? The sky is the limit.

Keep in mind you are not being asked to predict the school of the future. You are being asked to envision the school of the future, without the constraints that currently exist. Suspend disbelief; ignore finances; visualize; fantasize. Rest assured that you don't have to build or staff or develop curriculum for this future school; you simply have to develop the vision.

STEP #8: CREATING A VISION

PROCESS

GOAL: *To develop a joint vision of the ideal school of the future, as a basis for planning strategic goals.*

SPECIAL MATERIALS NEEDED:

- Five signs, with string, which can be hung around the necks of participants, saying STUDENT, TEACHER, PRINCIPAL, PARENT, COMMUNITY MEMBER.

TIPS:

- Step #8 contains activities that should be relaxed, easy, and perhaps humorous. Encourage interaction. Have team members bring in interesting snacks and beverages, or provide them for the group.
- See The Sample Vision of a School of the Future, page 78, for an example of a "school of the future scenario." Read it to the group as an opening activity if you think it would be helpful.
- Role playing can be threatening. However, having people volunteer to play a role which is not their traditional role reduces this threat. For example, the principal might play the role of parent, the superintendent the role of student, etc.

OUTCOME/PRODUCT: A written description of the team's vision of the ideal school of the future.

1. Arrange the room.

There are five roles to play in this role-playing panel: student, teacher, principal, parent, community member. These people should sit on one side of a table facing the remaining members, who are "questioners." Ask for two volunteers to record on butcher paper the ideas that surface. The butcher paper should be on walls behind the role-playing panel. Everyone will switch roles before the exercise is completed.

2. Select panelists to begin developing a group vision of the ideal school of the future.

Ask for five volunteers for the role-playing panel. Have panel members put their "role signs" around their necks. Seat people as described above. Explain that recorders will write down key ideas, using the panelists' own words when describing the ideal school of the future. Two recorders are needed because ideas will surface quickly, and the recorders should alternate capturing the key phrases.

3. Begin generating the "vision."

Remind panelists that (1) they should respond based on the role they are playing; (2) they should limit their remarks to one minute; (3) they will get multiple chances to expand on their remarks. Remind questioners that they may ask follow-up or clarification questions after each panelist has spoken. Ask the first panel member to make a statement beginning with, "I envision a school which (or where) . . ." Continue this exercise until each panelist has responded. Recorders will be recording key phrases.

4. Encourage follow-up questions.

Have questioners ask follow-up or clarifying questions. (Allow fifteen to twenty minutes.) For example, if the panelist envisions a "school without walls" that uses community sites, a follow-up question might be, "What kind of locations would be appropriate for this type of education?"

5. Switch roles.

Panelists and recorders now become the audience (questioners), and the questioners become panelists or recorders. Duplicate the process given above. If ideas from this role-playing exercise duplicate some of those expressed earlier, the recorders may simply asterisk repeat items.

6. Discuss the ideas that have been generated.

Have everyone move so they can see the butcher paper. Discuss the ideas for general agreement or disagreement, because the goal of this meeting is to come to general consensus on the main points. If there is sharp disagreement on one or more points, move on to the next point rather than focus on a divisive point.

7. Develop written scenario.

Since the Creating a Vision step is likely to take more than one meeting, consider asking a volunteer to work independently (or with the process manager, if that is preferred) to write a scenario describing the ideal school of the future, based on agreed-upon issues, and mail it to remaining team members so they may read the draft between meetings. The scenario should present a broad view of the ideal school, focusing on the future and general future directions, and should take the form of desired results, not quantifiable measures.

8. Refine the scenario.

Read the draft scenario. Discuss strengths, weaknesses, areas of agreement or disagreement. (Since the issues included in the scenario were developed by the group, it is unlikely that there will be disagreement.) Revise language, if necessary, until there is consensus that the scenario, which is now a team report, reflects the feelings and beliefs of group members.

SPECIAL NOTE: It is important that good ideas not be lost because the group cannot come to consensus. It is acceptable to attach to the group scenario a list headed: "Ideas to consider in the future," or "Ideas which need further study."

STEP #8: INFORMATION SHEET

SAMPLE VISION OF A SCHOOL OF THE FUTURE

In fifteen or twenty years, the schools in the district will have the same basic goals as they do now--a balance between preparing students academically for the future and preparing them to be caring, productive members of the community--but there will be stronger programs to reach these goals.

The "basics" will still be the foundation of the curriculum, but there will be far greater emphasis on science and technology. For example, it will be possible for students to take field trips to a space station.

Computers will play an important part in the lives of students, providing them with access to international communication networks. This will give new meaning to the terms "global village" and "global studies."

"Schools of Choice," where students may choose to attend any school in the state, will be widely accepted, and will have created healthy competition among schools in the district. Although costs will have escalated, a combination of lottery funds, foundation funds, adopt-a-school programs, and major fundraising drives will have provided a financial base that allows teachers and administrators to receive salaries commensurate with professionals in the business world.

Computers will perform administrative tasks; consequently, faculty will be able to spend more time working directly with students. Counselors will have developed personalized programs for each student, thus aiding them in their life choices. Because there will be more individual attention paid to students, they will look forward to attending school each day.

A two-year community service component following high school will be required of each young person, the result of which will be free college tuition. Consequently, higher education will be available to anyone who might benefit from it. This community service program also will have brought the schools and community closer together.

GETTING READY FOR STEP #9

- Prepare for the superintendent any necessary progress report for presentation to the Board.
- Mail to all team members:
  - Next meeting's agenda (including date, time, and location of meeting);
  - Strategic Planner's Notebook #9: Building Strategic Goals;
  - Typed copy of the ideal school of the future scenario developed during Step #8.

STRATEGIC PLANNER'S NOTEBOOK #9:

BUILDING STRATEGIC GOALS

Now it is time to gather all previous information into a realistic plan for district action over the next three to five years. To again use the analogy of planning a journey, the previous steps have provided these needed pieces of information:

- Intended destination: the vision of the ideal school
- Capability for travel: internal scan
- Preferred ways of traveling: mission statement and organizational values
- Conditions affecting travel: external scan
- Estimates of future conditions during the journey: surprise-free scenario

From this information you will now plan the district's "journey" into the future by writing its strategic goals.

Without losing the substance of the vision created in Step #8, it is now necessary to make the dream realistic. The strategic planning team must analyze the vision for its basic themes and ideas. By sifting these themes and ideas through the "reality" of district values, capabilities, and external conditions, the team will translate these ideas into strategic goals: four to six fundamental tasks or directions for the next few years.

It is important to remember that strategic goals are "directions" for the district, not concrete, operational plans. Those "action plans" will be written by those who carry out the actual work. The strategic plan--once approved by the Board of Education--will give district staff a touchstone to guide their work; it will not tell them specifically how to do their jobs.

When the strategic goals are finalized, the work of the strategic planning team will be almost complete. All that will be left will be to decide how to write up the final report and how to present it to the Board of Education for adoption.

STEP #9: BUILDING STRATEGIC GOALS

PROCESS

GOAL: *To develop a list of four to six strategic goals that will chart the district's direction for the next three to five years.*

SPECIAL MATERIALS NEEDED:

- All past work: the list of organizational values, the mission statement, results of the external and internal scans, the surprise-free scenario, and the vision of an ideal school. Have the butcher paper versions up on the walls and ask team members to bring their typed copies.

TIPS:

- At this point, everyone has lots of papers to go through, in referring back to previous lists and statements. Be alert to the problem that paper-shuffling may distract team members or hold up the work.
- This step may take one or more four-hour meetings. If possible, schedule these closely--evening meetings each week or an eight-hour retreat--so that momentum is not lost.

OUTCOME/PRODUCT: A list of four to six strategic goals, each written briefly and succinctly, using a common format.

1. Select topic areas for four to six strategic goals.

Team members should analyze their vision of the ideal school (Step #8), looking for key ideas or recurrent themes that represent desirable futures for the school district. These themes can be used as topic areas for strategic goals.

Team members are also free to suggest topic areas from other parts of their strategic planning study. They may consider the mission statement and the list of organizational values for "ideals" that the vision exercise did not happen to catch. They may also consider giving "strategic goal" status to something identified by the internal scan: correcting a glaring district weakness or enhancing a particular district strength.

The surprise-free scenario identified important assumptions about the district's future. Really major changes predicted by the scenario should probably be planned for through strategic goals. For example, if your surprise-free scenario estimates an enrollment increase of thirty-five percent in the next three years, you may well want to write a strategic goal on district planning for enrollment growth.

There should be no more than four to six strategic goals during a strategic planning cycle. If the team originally opts for a longer list, try to get them to prioritize or prune.

2. Write actual goal statements around the selected topics.

See Sample Strategic Goal Statements, pages 86-87 for examples.
The team may write all goals as a unit, or split into small groups to write separate goal statements for team approval.

As team members get ready to write their goal statements, encourage them to be innovative. After all, the major reason for having a school/community strategic planning team is to provide fresh perspectives and new ideas. Remind them that they can exercise creativity without fear of being outlandish, because their work will be sifted later through some "reality checks" and the input of district personnel.

3. REALITY CHECK #1: Examine each individual goal.

As a group, or in small groups, take each goal individually. Examine it against the list of organizational values, the district mission statement, the external scan report, the surprise-free scenario, and identified internal resources, strengths, or weaknesses. Ask about each goal:

- Does it fit with our mission statement and our organizational values?
- Does it effectively address one of the needs, problems, or opportunities we've identified through our scans and scenarios? Is it the best way we can think of to address that need, problem, or opportunity?
- Are we capable of doing it?
- Is it something we really want to do?

4. REALITY CHECK #2: Compare the goals to each other.

As a whole group, examine the goals in relation to each other. Ask:

- Does any one goal conflict with, or prevent the realization of, another goal? If so, must we drop one, or can we find a compromise that allows us to do both?
- Do any goals complement each other?
- Can all be reasonably accomplished in our time frame?
- Do we have a priority among these goals? Are some more important and/or more time-dependent, so that they should be granted some kind of "urgent" status?

5. Secure input/approval of strategic goals from district employees.

Many district employees have been involved to date, but at this point bringing in an even broader sampling of district personnel is advisable. Since they will be the ones who actually implement these

strategic goals, it is vital that they have a role in shaping them. Their participation can take many forms: they might be asked to select topic areas, to assist in drafting the goals, or to critique the goals written by the team. The superintendent should decide which type of participation is best, based on operational and political realities within the district.

The superintendent will also have options in selecting which district employees participate in this step. An existing body might be chosen, such as the district office administrative team, the principals' group, or a standing council or "think tank" representing all district employees. Or a special group may be called into being for this task, selected from the "key influencers" among district staff, whose approval will carry the greatest weight with their peers.

6. Write up goal statements in finished, standard form.

The team might choose to write the goals as a unit or to delegate that task to an individual or small group that will return with finished statements for review.

The information sheet, Sample Strategic Goal Statements, pages 86-87, includes ideas for goal format as well as for wording. Selection of a format is a matter of team preference and the team's views about what will make the best presentation to the Board of Education.

7. Plan the writing of the team's final report.

Decide who will draft the final report, because the next meeting will involve critiquing the draft and planning the presentation to the Board of Education for adoption.

We suggest that the report include at least the following:

- A list of the team members
- A brief explanation of the strategic planning process (what did you spend all these months doing?)
- The district mission statement

- The organizational values statements (these may be placed in the body or in an appendix)
- The surprise-free scenario or a narrative that encompasses the internal/external scan and scenario findings (this explains to the reader the assumptions on which you based your decisions and choices)
- The strategic goals (with rationales)

If you summarize your findings in the body of the report, you may or may not wish to append the actual product of each step (e.g. the values list or the external scan report).

According to the literature on strategic planning, the ideal final report is quite succinct: basically just the mission statement and the strategic goals, with a bit of rationale and justification. Any supportive materials (such as the surprise-free scenario) should be placed in appendixes. But in reality, final reports vary widely in length and format. Some include long narratives about the perceived future and/or many pages of supportive data, e.g., enrollment projection graphs and standardized test score reports.

There is a fine balance here. A concise report allows the reader to quickly grasp key ideas, without getting lost in detail. But a data-based report with a great deal of background information and rationale probably makes it easier for the reader to follow the team's thinking and to appreciate the year or more of work that went into the final report.

8. Wrap up the strategic planning process.

Point out to the team that its work is now complete, except for the presentation to the Board. Congratulate the team on accomplishing its difficult task. You may want to stage some kind of celebration!

STEP #9: INFORMATION SHEET

SAMPLE STRATEGIC GOAL STATEMENTS

NOTE: Your final report will be read by people who didn't participate in your months of study and debate; they will need background information if they are to understand the strategic goals you've designed. They will need to know your rationale for selecting each particular goal: What district need, problem, or opportunity does it address? What is your justification for making this particular issue a strategic goal?

The two sample formats here address the "rationale" issue in different ways. Sample Format #1 simply presents the goals; it assumes that rationales are presented as a preface or in another part of the report. Sample Format #2 includes the rationale with the goal statement.

Sample Format #1:

Example a:

STRATEGIC GOAL #___: XXX School District will work to improve the availability of quality after-school child care for youngsters in grades K-8.

Example b:

Goal #__: To enhance partnerships with parents, community, and business so that they become more involved in the actual learning process with students.

Example c:

As retirement thins the district teacher and administrator population, to actively recruit highly talented educators, with attention to gender and ethnic balance. To provide all new teachers with a systematic and helpful induction.

Example d:

To make the most efficient use of the existing school plant and ensure its proper maintenance for maximum life.

Sample Format #2:

GOAL: To improve assessment and placement of Non-English-Speaking and Limited-English-Speaking students entering our district, so that this group of students will exhibit fewer academic problems and better achievement in content subjects.

RATIONALE: Our population of immigrant children has increased to 10 percent in the last five years and projections indicate further growth, to about 20 percent by the year 2000. Of these, about 70 percent need special instruction in English. We have adequate bilingual staff, but intake of students and assessment is haphazard, as indicated by complaints from teachers, parents, and students that too many students are placed in "the wrong class."

GETTING READY FOR STEP #10

- Ensure that a draft of the final report is prepared by those assigned to do it.
- Mail to all team members:
  - Next meeting's agenda (including date, time and location of meeting);
  - Strategic Planner's Notebook #10: Gaining Board Approval;
  - Draft of the final report, to be reviewed before the next meeting.

STRATEGIC PLANNER'S NOTEBOOK #10:

GAINING BOARD APPROVAL

After many months of meetings, analysis, and information gathering, you now have a draft copy of the strategic plan for the district. What remains is a critical step in the process: gaining the Board of Education's approval and support for the plan. Without that stamp of approval, there will be no implementation of the plan. Careful thought must be given to how this report is presented to the Board.

Some questions to keep in mind while preparing this presentation are:

- Who is your audience? Certainly the Board is, but you also need to consider the principals, faculty, and community members who will be present at the Board meeting.
- What should be presented? Board members will receive a prior copy of the plan, but you need to consider what should be highlighted during this presentation.
- How should the information be organized? Be sure to include background information on the plan (why it came to be developed), the purpose for your presentation (namely, that you are asking for Board approval), a brief description of the process used to arrive at the conclusions in the plan, and any relevant philosophy or assumptions.
- Who is to give the presentation and how long will it last? The superintendent will be a presenter, but s/he needs to decide if others should be involved, too. Regardless of who presents, the entire planning team should be present at the Board meeting as a demonstration of support, as well as to receive recognition for its work.
- What format will be used for the presentation? Audio-visual materials? Charts and graphs? Statistical data?

With these questions answered and based on the solid work you have been doing for several months developing the strategic plan, Board approval should be easy to obtain.

STEP #10: GAINING BOARD APPROVAL

PROCESS

GOAL: *To approve the final draft of the strategic plan to be presented for adoption by the Board of Education, and to plan the presentation to the Board.*

SPECIAL MATERIALS NEEDED:

None

TIPS:

- Don't let the group get hung up on minor language changes when reviewing the draft report.
- Encourage all group members to be at the presentation as a demonstration of solidarity for the plan.

OUTCOME/PRODUCT: A final draft of the strategic plan and an outline of the presentation to the Board of Education.

1. Review the draft of the strategic plan.

Determine if there are any glaring errors or omissions in the plan. Was anything left out, such as the mission statement or the strategic goals?

2. Determine if any language changes need to be made.

Focus on major changes in language, not minor word changes. Note, on butcher paper, any changes to be made with the number of the page on which the revision is needed, for easy reference by the writers.

3. Plan the presentation to the Board.

- When can the report be presented to the Board? When will the report be done? When is the next Board meeting? What is the lead time needed to put it on the Board agenda?
- How many copies of the strategic plan are needed for the presentation and who is responsible for making them? Do you want extra copies available for anyone present at the Board meeting?
- How is the plan to be presented? What format will be used, what will be covered, and how long it will take. (Take into account what the Board has already heard in the periodic progress reports.)
- Who is going to give the presentation? Will one person cover everything, or will you have multiple presenters?

4. Assign follow-up tasks.

Based on the discussion and decisions above, make specific personal assignments for follow-up tasks. Include a deadline date by which these tasks will be accomplished. Cover the following:

- Who will rewrite the draft to reflect any changes the team has made?

- Who has responsibility for what part(s) of the presentation? If you decide to use more than one presenter, have them coordinate and/or practice the presentation so that transitions between speakers will be smooth and there is no duplication of material presented.
- Who will make any visuals, graphs, or charts for use during the presentation?

Prior to the Board presentation:

5. Ask the superintendent to put the strategic plan presentation on the Board agenda and to provide advance copies of the plan to all Board members.

6. Send out reminder notices to all team members regarding the date, time, and location of the Board meeting.

The final step:

7. Give the presentation to the Board, requesting their approval and adoption of the strategic plan.

AFTERWARDS:

PUTTING THE PLAN TO WORK

Once the strategic planning report is accepted by the Board, implementation becomes the province of regular district management. It will follow normal district procedures used to allocate resources and plan activities around district goals. The work of the process manager and strategic planning team is finished, unless district management chooses to give them a future role. From now on, the fate of the plan rests with the strength of top management's commitment to it.

This is the crucial juncture. Either the strategic plan is now communicated throughout the district and becomes a living part of district functioning, or it dies. Although much of value will have been learned during the planning process itself, failure by top management to keep the plan alive will likely result in disappointment and cynicism.

Enthusiasm is usually very high during the strategic planning process, for it is challenging, engaging, and enlightening. But afterwards, the attitude usually develops, "Well, that was fun, but now I've got to get back to my real job." Top management has to provide meaningful incentives to keep people engaged through the implementation phase. One method might be to build the implementation tasks into administrators' job performance objectives.

Making the plan live not only means bringing district personnel into the "vision" and keeping them enthused, it also means really using the strategic plan as a basis for budgets and programs. Now the choices become real, difficult, and political. It may seem logical, due to the strategic plan, to close a school or to cut certain staff members, but every educator knows how difficult it is to really accomplish these things. Top management needs the courage to re-direct district resources around the plan (or as one strategic planner calls it, "the courage to practice organizational weight control . . . [to] feed opportunities and starve problems").

Several tasks need to be accomplished:

Bringing the entire district into the vision. All stakeholders must buy in to the strategic plan, if they are to use it to guide their work. As leader of the district, the superintendent's first task is to communicate the strategic plan's vision to all concerned school and community members. This may be done through various means, such as mailings or meetings. (The superintendent might want to involve the strategic planning team members in communicating the vision they jointly created. They might use some or all of the presentation they designed for the Board of Education in Step #10.)

A leader needs to explain a vision clearly, in ways that are understandable to various groups of stakeholders. People have different levels of response to a leader's vision, ranging from hostility, to indifference, to acceptance, to support, to enthusiastic advocacy. Some people are far more willing to change than others are. A leader needs to be able to read the response level of each key stakeholder and to design a message to reach that particular person, moving him or her at least one step higher on the commitment scale.

It is important to remember that leaders communicate as loudly--or more loudly--through their actions than through their words. Top management can prove its own commitment to the plan by the way it spends time explaining the vision to stakeholders, supports implementation planning with funds and released time, and allocates resources.

Planning for implementation. Each unit (each school and the district office) will develop its own site plan and budget around the mission statement and strategic goals. Separate "action plans" are often written for each strategic goal. Some districts select principals to write school level action plans; others use teacher committees or the school/community Site Council.

Action plans include concrete operational objectives, a list and schedule of tasks, and names of the person(s) responsible. These plans go through the usual program and budgetary approval channels, but they also need to be reviewed by an "oversight committee" for their alignment to the strategic plan. Whoever does the oversight should have a thorough knowledge of the plan. For this task, the superintendent might choose himself/herself alone or the district management team.

Implementing the plan. Again, usual district procedures for implementing or changing a program are followed. As new programs are developed, staff development--as always--is a key concern.

Evaluating the plan. Efforts to meet strategic goals will be evaluated by the usual procedures for determining if a program's results meet district objectives.

But there is another level of evaluation to be accomplished: evaluation of the strategic plan itself. After about one year, the management team, the Board, or the reconvened strategic planning team--whichever group management wishes to entrust with this task--needs to review and essentially re-do the strategic plan. It will not be the same long and detailed process explained in this book, but an informal study that answers the following questions:

- Do our organization values and mission statement still hold up?
- Is our external scan still valid? Has anything changed? If so, how does it affect our plan?
- Is our internal scan still valid? Are the improvements we've made moving us toward our strategic goals? Do changes in internal conditions require us to revise our strategic goals?
- Does progress to date indicate that our strategic goals are realistic and workable?

If any part of the strategic plan is not working, it should be changed. Likewise, as circumstances and conditions change, the strategic plan should be modified.

This will not be the same weighty task it was the first time. The basic pieces (e.g., the external and internal scans, the mission statement) are already in place, as is the data collection system that monitors them. (Conducting the original scans has determined what types of information are needed and where to get it.) The plan simply needs a periodic review and "tune up" to meet changing conditions.

An ongoing cycle of analysis and planning is the ultimate goal of strategic planning. When it is in place (which may take a few years), it demonstrates that management has developed the habit of "strategic thinking": the habit of viewing the world proactively and

creatively, of looking for threats, so that they may be avoided, and for opportunities, so that they may be grasped early for maximum growth and benefit.

APPENDIX A: TIPS FOR EFFECTIVE MEETINGS

There are certain generic tasks that must be completed to make any meeting successful, regardless of the content of that meeting. Advance planning is what makes meetings successful. A rule of thumb is that, for every hour spent in a meeting, you will spend an hour in planning. Good meetings don't just happen--they must be carefully planned. Careful planning of the agenda, purpose/goals of the meeting, and desired outcome will make the meeting successful.

Before the Meeting

- Determine the meeting date.
- Establish beginning and ending times.
- Determine the meeting location.
- Establish the purpose/objective of the meeting.
- Arrange for refreshments to be served (if any).
- Develop the agenda and send it out before the meeting date, along with relevant background materials.
- Invite guest speakers (if needed).
- Decide who is going to run the meeting: you or an outside facilitator.
- Hire an outside facilitator (if needed). Brief the facilitator on purpose of the meeting and task(s) to be accomplished.
- Decide the room arrangement: will people be seated at tables? in a semicircle? in a whole circle?
- Arrange for the room to be set up one hour before the meeting is to begin.
- Decide what special equipment might be needed (e.g. flip charts, AV equipment, flow pens, butcher paper, masking tape). Arrange for equipment to be at the meeting site.

During the Meeting

- Start and end the meeting on time.
- Go over the agenda and purpose(s) for the meeting as the first order of business.
- Keep team members on task. (See Appendix F for tips.)
- Minimize conflicts that might occur between team members. (See Appendix F for tips.)
- Have the team help establish the agenda for the next meeting and determine the next meeting date, time, and location.
- During the last five minutes, have the participants briefly evaluate the meeting.

After the Meeting

- Type up any relevant group notes or minutes for distribution.
- Follow up on necessary actions.
- Begin planning for the next meeting.

APPENDIX B: WORKING WITH A FACILITATOR

A facilitator is skilled in managing the process of a meeting. The facilitator is a neutral, objective manager who offers no opinions or input during the content discussions. The facilitator has no stake in the outcome of the meeting and can, therefore, maintain total neutrality. A facilitator is not a member of the team.

It is the job of the facilitator to help the team accomplish the task(s) it has set for itself by keeping the team focused on task, allowing all in the group to speak and be listened to, and by being an interaction catalyst when the discussion and/or process seems to bog down. The discussion/decisions surrounding the content of the meeting are the responsibility of the team members; how the team accomplishes these tasks is the responsibility of the facilitator.

The process manager is responsible for managing the strategic planning process, but a facilitator may be brought in to handle some of the meetings that will be held during the course of the strategic planning process. The more complex or emotional the content of the meeting, the more important it becomes to have a neutral facilitator. The process manager should decide which meetings may need a facilitator and work with him/her ahead of time to discuss the agenda, the desired outcomes, and any other relevant information pertaining to the upcoming meeting. At the beginning of a meeting where a facilitator is used for the first time, the process manager should introduce the facilitator and have the facilitator explain his/her role to the team.

Two issues face the process manager: 1) at which meetings to use a facilitator, and 2) whether to use a facilitator from outside the district or a trained staff member from within the district.

A Non-District Facilitator:

- Has no stake in the outcome. It is easier for a non-district "outsider" to maintain neutrality and not be influenced by working with colleagues and/or superiors.
- Brings a wide variety of experiences to the process, not just school experiences.

- Can attend meetings at all times.
- Is more expensive than someone already on staff. (This may be perceived as an unnecessary expenditure of funds.)
- May lack comprehensive knowledge of the district and/or school issues.

A Facilitator from Inside the District:

- May not be able to effectively maintain neutrality since he or she is a part of the district.
- May lack sufficient training and/or experience since facilitation would only be part of his/her job.
- May lose time needed for his/her "regular" job, unless released time provisions are made.
- Is less costly, since already on staff.
- Is familiar with the district, its policies, procedures, practices, and staffs.

Be sure to choose someone that you feel comfortable working with. For continuity's sake, it is a good idea to use the same facilitator throughout the whole process.

APPENDIX C: BRAINSTORMING

Brainstorming is a much-used group process technique that encourages participation from all in a free-flowing, idea-generating synergistic manner. Brainstorming, used properly, is a powerful tool that unleashes creativity in a controlled environment. Listed below are guidelines and techniques for using brainstorming during the strategic planning process.

Guidelines

- Establish a time frame for brainstorming: "We're going to brainstorm for ten minutes on this topic." If the group is really eager to extend the time, that's fine, but don't let brainstorming drag on. If the team has exhausted its list of ideas in five minutes, stop.

- Use at least one recorder. A recorder is a team member who agrees to remain neutral while capturing the essence of everyone's ideas and writing them down on butcher paper. If one recorder can't keep up, use a second recorder with a second sheet of butcher paper.

- No discussion, evaluation, or criticism of any idea is ever allowed. The recorder can say "I didn't understand that last idea," but that is the extent of the discussion. Taking time to evaluate or discuss would inhibit the team, and it stifles the creative flow of ideas.

- Make sure that everyone is clear on the topic of the brainstorming. "We're now going to spend ten minutes brainstorming on the topic of the present values of our school system." Saying "Let's brainstorm about our school district," is too unfocused and vague; it will result in ideas all over the map.

- The person leading the brainstorming session (process manager or facilitator) must enforce the ground rules and remain neutral, while making sure that everyone keeps focused and on task. Stop anyone who begins to evaluate and/or discuss another's suggestion. Don't add your own ideas while the team is brainstorming. After the session is over, you may add your own ideas.

Process

Listed below are three suggested ways to conduct a brainstorming session. The technique you choose will depend on your specific team. You may want to "mix and match" these techniques throughout the strategic planning process, so that you don't lose the team's interest by always brainstorming in exactly the same manner.

Large group brainstorming. The whole group brainstorms together around the topic. Have one or two recorders ready to write ideas on butcher paper for all to see. To set the stage, you might say: "We're going to spend the next ten minutes brainstorming on topic X. Remember that during brainstorming no discussion, criticism, or evaluation of ideas is allowed. We want to encourage as many different ideas as possible. Feel free to piggy-back on someone else's idea. Does anyone have any questions about the task at hand? Good. Let's brainstorm."

Individual brainstorming. Give each member of the team a 3X5 card. Have each person write down as many ideas as s/he can think of on the topic at hand. Encourage everyone to be as creative and free-flowing as possible. Allow five minutes for this task. When the time is up, ask one person to read the ideas from his/her card. Record the ideas on butcher paper. Ask others to add the ideas from their cards, without duplicating any ideas already listed. Variation: pair group members and have them generate a list together on 3X5 cards. Have each pair report out the items on their list.

Two small groups. Break the team into two. Have each small group brainstorm on the same topic, writing their answers onto butcher paper. Bring the groups back together and have one member report out on the items listed on their sheets of butcher paper.

Once brainstorming is complete and you have a list of ideas on butcher paper, the next step is to clarify any items that are vague. Tell the group, "Now we're going to go over the ideas that we just generated to clarify any that are vague. I'm going to start on this sheet of butcher paper. If anyone needs clarification of the item listed as I pass my hand over it, please stop me." When someone has a question on an item, stop and gain clarification. Usually the person whose idea it is will explain what was meant.

After clarifying items on the list, the next step is to combine similar or like concepts. Using clean sheets of butcher paper, write down the combined items. For example, two similar ideas related to value statements might be "we believe in bilingual education" and "bilingual education is important in our district." These would become one idea such as "we believe in the value of bilingual education within our district." Cross the items off the "old" sheets of paper as they are put on the new sheets of paper. That way, all ideas will be accounted for. (Some brainstorming groups have this done by an individual between meetings, in order to save time for the group, which then only needs to approve the completed list.)

Once the list has been finalized, the information should be typed up and distributed to all members. You might want to keep the sheets of butcher paper to use as a visual reminder at future meetings.

APPENDIX D: GAINING CONSENSUS

Early on in the strategic planning process, it is important for the team to decide how it will make decisions. If members decide to make decisions by consensus, then every decision must be worked and reworked until all can "live with" the decision.

Consensus means there is enough agreement so that team members won't sabotage a decision later on. It creates a "win-win" situation by making sure that everyone can "live with" or support a decision, before the group moves forward. Operating by consensus ensures that you have all group members "on board" with any decision or action. While it can be time consuming, especially if decisions have to be reworked, in the long run it will forge stronger support for any group action or decision.

Consensus does not mean that everyone is equally committed to a decision. For example, individuals in the group may have drafted phrases for the school of the future scenario that not everyone on the team "loves," or a couple of team members may be balking at accepting certain phrases in the mission statement. That's okay. The relevant question to ask each member of the team is, "Can you live with this?"

If anyone says no, you can't go forward until you handle this disagreement. You need to back up. Re-examine the item. Ask those who are dissenting, "What are the points of disagreement?" It may be minor language changes. In that case, ask dissenters to suggest language modifications. Can the rest of the group live with what has been suggested? If so, you can move forward. If not, you must stop and rework the language until everyone can "live with" what has been presented. Ideally, of course, you would like everyone to support and love the language equally, but this is often not possible.

Consensus is different from the "majority rules" system, where there are "winners" and "losers." A majority rules system can create hard feelings, and members of the "minority" opinion may lie in wait to sabotage the team later on.

We recommend that "decision by consensus" be used as the primary method of decision making during the strategic planning process.

APPENDIX E: DETERMINING PRIORITIES

Let's assume the planning team has identified eight issues they would like to turn into goal statements. However, since eight issues is too many, it's necessary to prioritize. Determine priorities by completing the "priority block" (also called "forced pairing").

Directions:

1. Label each issue with A, B, C, D, etc. For example, let's assume "A" deals with personnel, "B" with Non-English-Speaking students, "C" with finances, "D" with year round schools, etc.

2. Draw a block like the one on the next page, large enough to list each letter (or issue) twice--once vertically and once horizontally.

3. Ask the group to determine whether A is more important than B. If yes, put an A in both boxes where A and B intersect, as in the model. Work down the list, asking if A is more important than C, D, E, etc., putting the letter of each "more important" issue in both boxes where those letters intersect.

4. Add up the number of A's in the horizontal "A" row, the number of B's in the B row, etc. Those issues with the highest scores are the ones the team considers more important.

On the accompanying chart, there are seven possible points per issue. Issues A, F, G (5 points each) and C (4 points) probably would be developed into strategic goals. B (2 points) and H (1 point) probably would be dropped from consideration. The group might want to discuss D and E further.

If the team cannot agree on the relative importance of the issues, you might try reproducing blank charts, with the issues labelled A, B, C, D, etc. and have each member complete a chart individually. Then add individual totals and enter them on a master chart.

DETERMINING PRIORITIES

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	TOTAL
A		a	c	a	a	f	a	a	5
B	a		c	d	e	b	g	b	2
C	c	c		d	c	f	g	c	4
D	a	d	d		e	f	g	d	3
E	a	e	c	e		e	g	h	3
F	f	b	f	f	e		f	f	5
G	a	g	g	g	g	f		g	5
H	a	b	c	d	h	f	g		1

APPENDIX F:

TIPS FOR KEEPING ON TASK AND MINIMIZING CONFLICTS

One of the most common frustrations people have about meetings is the fact that, during most meetings, members stray off task. Going off task can also lead to disruptive behavior and conflicts. Here are some tips that can help you, as a meeting leader, to keep your team on the topic at hand and to avoid potential conflicts:

- Act as a role model for the group. If you are always prepared, on time, and focused on the task at hand, the team will start to follow your lead and will start to self-monitor its behavior.

- Use the agenda to keep the team focused on the task at hand. If the agenda item is to brainstorm a list of present values in the district, and someone insists on discussing the evils of the tenure system, it is easy to say "John, we're discussing the values of the district. How do you see the tenure system falling into that discussion?" Using the agenda, you've just brought John back to task.

- Keep an "issues sheet" at each session. This is a blank sheet of butcher paper headed "Issues." If John starts talking about tenure, you can list "tenure" on the issues sheet, but stay focused on the agenda item of "values." John can see that he has been heard by looking at the issues sheet. Disposition of the items on the issues sheet can be decided by the team at a later time.

- Use a facilitator for the meeting. A facilitator's job is to keep the group on task.

- Keep away from personal issues and personalities. Teams tend to "personalize" issues and find it tempting to "point fingers." Keep the team focused on the issue, not the individuals behind the issue.

- Keep the team in the present. Naturally, during the course of strategic planning, it will be appropriate to focus on the past history of the issue under discussion, but avoid the syndrome of

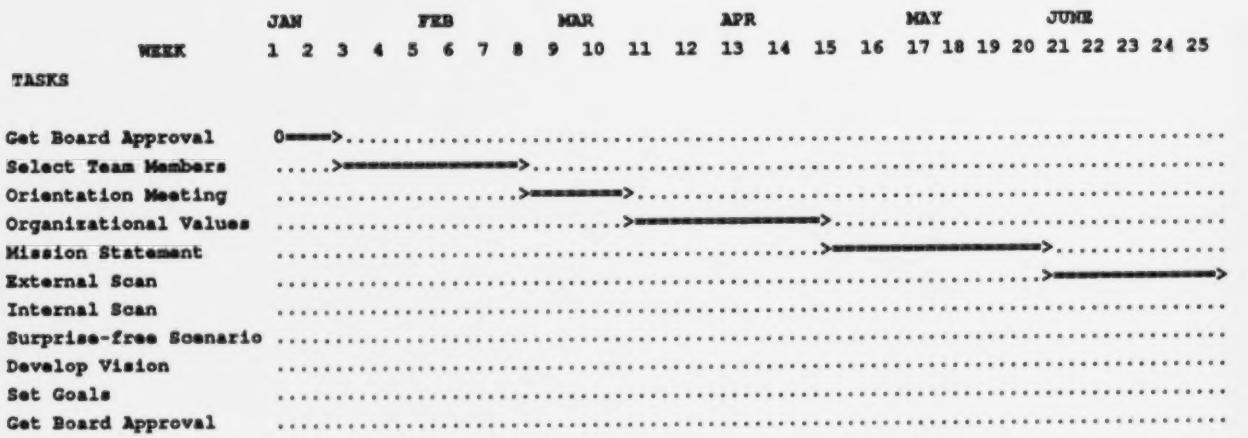
"Well, that won't work because we tried it 20 years ago and it failed then." Turn that type of negative around with a comment like, "Well, let's look at it now because times have changed."

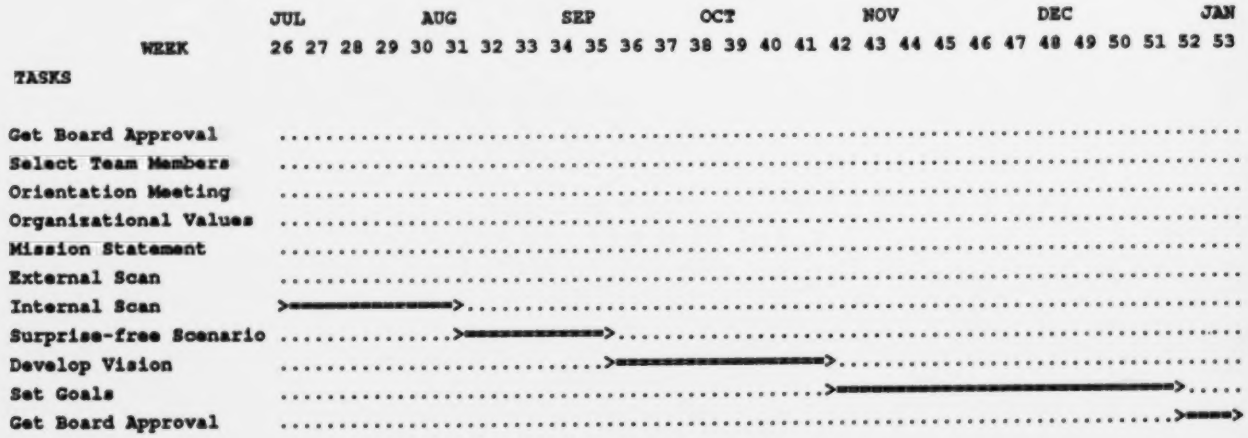
- Have team members take ownership for feelings, opinions, and attitudes. When you hear members saying things like, "They won't approve of this," have them take ownership by asking, "How do you feel about this issue?"

- Allow all in the group to speak and encourage those who haven't spoken to do so. A caution, however: don't force someone to speak who either is unprepared to do so or doesn't want to do so. If you are concerned about an overly quiet member of the team, discuss your concern about his/her participation privately.

APPENDIX G: TIMELINE

The following one-year timeline assumes approximately two three-hour meetings per month, and perhaps an all-day retreat or two as the planning team works through some of the knottier issues, with sub-committees working on various tasks. Some districts have taken more than three years to complete these tasks; few have completed them in less than one year.


JAN FEB MAR APR MAY JUNE
WEEK 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25
TASKS
Get Board Approval
Select Team Members
Orientation Meeting
Organizational Values
Mission Statement
External Scan
Internal Scan
Surprise-free Scenario
Develop Vision
Set Goals
Get Board Approval


JUL AUG SEP OCT NOV DEC JAN
WEEK 26 27 28 29 30 31 32 33 34 35 36 37 38 39 40 41 42 43 44 45 46 47 48 49 50 51 52 53
TASKS
Get Board Approval
Select Team Members
Orientation Meeting
Organizational Values
Mission Statement
External Scan
Internal Scan
Surprise-free Scenario
Develop Vision
Set Goals
Get Board Approval

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